

Out of the Fire



Out of the Fire

Ales Adamovich

Yanka Bryl

Vladimir Kolesnik



Progress Publishers
Moscow

Translated by *Angelia Graf* and *Nina Belenkaya*
Designed by *Arlen Kashkurevich*

**Алесь Адамович
Янка Брыль
Владимир Колесник**

Я ИЗ ОГНЕННОЙ ДЕРЕВНИ

На английском языке

English translation © Progress Publishers, 1980

Я $\frac{70500-928}{014(01)-80}$ 97-80

4702120000

CONTENTS

BARBARKA	8
MOTHER AND SON. SON AND MOTHER	19
A WHOLE DISTRICT ON FIRE	30
I ALSO CAME FROM THE VILLAGE OF FIRE	67
THE THIRTIETH	99
CHILDLESS	109
THE MEN	118
OVER TEN	133
TWO OLD AGES	152
KNYAZHEVODTSY	162
ZBYSHIN	177
VELIKAYA GAROZHA	192
A CHILD RUNNING ALONG A FURROW	199
IT WAS AWFUL THERE IN THE EARTH	210
THE FINAL KISS	217
ACTION, OPERATION, EXPEDITION	226
BEAST HUNTS MAN	253
GENGHIZ KHAN EQUIPPED WITH THE TELEGRAPH	277
"SELECTION"	288
BOUNDLESS GRIEF	304
NEW CHILDREN	326
I CAN'T... I DON'T KNOW HOW TO	347
KOPATSEVICH	360
RAZLITYE	373
MEMORY	380
KHATYN AND OTHER KHATYNS	399
SOURCES. LITERATURE	467

It would seem that mankind knows all there is to know about nazism. The ashes of its millions of victims burn people's hearts.

And yet some people keep trying again and again to white wash this plague of the 20th century in the eyes of new generations, who themselves did not experience the horrors of the Second World War.

But there is such a thing as the people's memory, and it lives on – the incorruptible memory of the nazism of the Gestapo, concentration camps, Khatyn. The peoples' trial did not end at Nuremberg; it continues in their memory. This trial of theirs is essential not only in the name of historical justice. It is essential to the living, those who are threatened by future führers. Not without reason is it said that he who does not remember his past is doomed to live it over again.

This is why it is so vitally important that the people's memory, the truth about nazism, sound throughout the world.

The Khatyns – villages that were burnt down and destroyed together with their inhabitants – are a living truth, burning with pain and anger in the memory of Byelorussia. The inhabitants of the more than two hundred Byelorussian towns that were destroyed in the war and the more than nine thousand villages that were burnt down, many hundreds of them wiped out together with the people living in them, have something to tell the whole world. Not only about the nazism which other countries saw as well, but also about that which they would have seen if the nazis had set about realizing their "final settlement in Europe"...

It cost the Soviet people more than twenty million human lives to wreck that "final plan", to wrest victory from the hands of the fanatic racists.

A decisive part in this nationwide struggle was played by the devotion to their country and human courage of the partisans and underground fighters, of all those Soviet people whom the nazis could only kill but were unable to turn into slaves. The hundreds of thousands of Soviet partisans and underground fighters (there were over 440,000 of them in Byelorussia alone) and the millions of those who served as a reserve and home front for the people's avengers prevented the hitlerites from fully realizing their General Plan Ost, according to which scores of millions of Slavs alone were condemned to extermination.

But the “plan” did operate, the full weight of the racists’ historically unparalleled cruelty falling above all on children, women and feeble old people...

Out of the Fire is a documentary tragedy, evoking the memory and living voices of the people who were burnt, killed together with their families and their whole villages and who are still alive today.

Listen to what the people have to say about these events, what they remember.

Dozens of kilometres of tape on which the accounts of over three hundred direct witnesses of tragedies like Khatyn’s are recorded make up the contents of this book. Thousands of kilometres of roads – asphalt highways, cart tracks and forest paths – link these victims of nazi atrocities. The Witnesses of the Truth who miraculously survived live all over Byelorussia, in the 147 villages where we tracked them down, making the rounds of thirty-five of the republic’s districts.

Of course there are considerably more villages in Byelorussia which shared the tragic fate of Khatyn. But we were unable to find direct witnesses everywhere, and recorded only those people who themselves experienced the horrible fate of their fellow-villagers. We also saw a good number of dead villages where not a soul was left – only a few old trees, still black and scorched, the forlorn sweep of a well and grassgrown streets...

Gathered on the pages of this book are people who came out of the fire and from under the earth, in the most real and literal sense. People from villages of fire have gathered here to bear witness, question, judge, and tell about what it is fearful to know and dangerous to forget.

We saw our task to lie in preserving the unbearable incandescence of human pain, bewilderment and rage, which are present not only in the words, but also in the voice, eyes and face of the narrators, in preserving all that, like the very air they breathe, surrounds the persons who spoke to us and now, from the pages of this book, address you, the reader. May the words of Ganna Gribovskaya from the village of Latygovo in martyred Vitebsk Region be addressed to you, too: “Nobody even knows that we went through the same torments as in Khatyn. It’s good that you came, because I myself... I can’t even tell about it – I’m crying...”

Barbarka

Barbarka was born in 1922 in a small town in Poland. She was the youngest of five children. Her father was a teacher and her mother was a housewife. She grew up in a very religious family. She attended a convent school and then a university in Krakow. She was very intelligent and hardworking. She was also very kind and generous. She was very popular among her friends and family. She was very devoted to her faith and her family. She was very active in her church and in her community. She was very involved in many different activities. She was very dedicated to her work and to her studies. She was very successful in everything she did. She was very happy and content with her life. She was very loved and respected by everyone who knew her. She was a very good person and a very good example for everyone. She was a very important person in her family and in her community. She was a very good friend and a very good neighbor. She was a very good mother and a very good wife. She was a very good daughter and a very good sister. She was a very good person and a very good example for everyone. She was a very important person in her family and in her community. She was a very good friend and a very good neighbor. She was a very good mother and a very good wife. She was a very good daughter and a very good sister. She was a very good person and a very good example for everyone.

June 1970

Brest Region, east of the town of Ivatsevichi in the Polesye wood and swamp lands.

Lakes, a forest, coppices and the lush greenery of meadows and fields bathed in sunlight, which gives way to a cloudy drizzle, then peals of thunder and a downpour.

All that now stands on the site of the village of Krasnitsa is a forest, already full-grown, with a little monument to the inhabitants of an entire village by the roadside. Where Tupichitsy and Vyada lay there is neither forest nor field nor meadow...

Where Tupichitsy once was there are now lone pear trees and oaks, scorched and strange almost to the point of horror, which will live out the rest of their long days bereft of human company. We reached the place by crossing the lake on a small boat and walking across the deep sand, which had become very hard because of the many seasonal thunderstorms.

The place that was once the village of Vyada and is now covered by a copse, weeds and the remains of the trees which once grew in people's orchards and on the streets, we saw from afar, from a knoll on which stands a solitary obelisk inscribed with words and figures.

Then we were back on Bobrovitskoe Lake, skimming over the unspeakably tender grey surface of its warm, nearly calm water flecked with white foam from the recent white-caps. Above our speed-boat roared a helicopter belonging to some geologist friends of the local collective farm chairman who was acting as our guide.

Young birches and lush grass now grow where Bobrovichi used to be. A hare darted out of a tussock. Today the place is nothing but a wasteland.

In the new Bobrovichi, which was rebuilt on a different site, we again, as in other settlements, like yesterday and the day before, recorded the ta-

les of those who survived.

High above the light-filled room of the collective-farm library where we listened to people's accounts, above the large new village, above all this corner of the western Polesye with its abundant lakes and forest — our victory towers to cosmic heights, while in the world new dangers come to a head and the struggle goes on to make them recede.

Down below, in the depths of the people's life, in all its generative simplicity, bleed the wounds of memory, for which there is no cure...

Barbarka, sixty-year-old **Barbara Adamovna Slesarchuk** is just one of the people whose wounded memory will not heal. She speaks with a strange and rather horrid grin, as though she were telling some dreadful story unusually far-away and long, long since lived through. She speaks at times almost exactly like a teller of fairytales, in a sing-song voice, with repetitions that don't seem superfluous, in the local mixture of three or four languages at one — Byelorussian, Ukrainian, Russian and Polish.

"...How'd they kill us? They killed us... It's even painful to tell... They killed my old man first. Burnt him up in the barn... What I went through. Four children, I was pregnant with the fifth... They set fire to it around five o'clock, toward evening. A German came and drove us out. One of my lads was herding the cattle and three were with me. My house was farther off then, where the collective farm yard is now. A German came and drove us out. We gathered in one house, about fifteen women. The women sit in the house like ewes. They thought: maybe the Germans only killed the menfolk and won't kill the women.

"One of them, Ostap's mother, says: 'They'll burn us alive. They didn't want us killed, the Germans. They'll burn us alive.'





They burned together with Tupichitsy

"I went out of the house, says: 'Let's run, women, run...'

"I had two little girls and a boy with me. They, those women, didn't want to run, but I went.

"The Germans stood, all around, they'd hemmed the village in a cordon all round, there were cordons on all sides, and Germans were walking around the village. Lots of them. I came out into the bushes in Bogatye. I didn't think to live. I didn't think to live. If only he doesn't see us, I thought, if only our skulls are knocked off just like that, if only we don't see our own death.

"Let's run over there so's not to see death face to face. If we get a bullet in the back of our head or shoulder,' I says, 'it will be the easier for us; it's so hard to wait for them to kill us. To see our own death face to face...'

"No one wanted to, no one did, but I went and ran myself. I ran, people began to run from Ostap's yard, that was our neighbour. I ran from the neighbour's and they're already cutting people down with a machine gun, and at this end and the other people are falling, falling... And my legs couldn't run any longer, where could I run anyway – I went and lay down under a shed.

"Here there's a shed and there there's a shed, and there, and I lay down behind the well. I covered the children with goose-foot, covered them up, and I lie there, too, there I lie... And the Germans, or the polizeis,* they'd have a drink of water there and go: 'A-a-ah!' And I keep on lying there... The bullets whistle and fly. There, that one killed me! But no, I feel nothing hurts. And I keep on lying...

* *Polizei* or policeman was the name given by Soviet people in the nazi-occupied territories to those traitors who served in the enemy police (from the German "Polizei" – police).

"My children were right there too. The little boy, Vasil, was two. He didn't even cry! And he was so little: two years old, a week into his third year.

"Mom,' he says, 'let's run away, let's run away! They won't kill us, Mom!'

"Oh sonny,' I says, 'any minute we'll stop running forever, we'll turn up our toes and part with this world, holy Sunday. Any moment they'll kill us, any moment.'

"No, Mom, they won't!...'

"And he was only two years old! Now he works as a fitter at the power station. That's what kind of person he is!...

"And the girl, six she was, says: 'You see, Mom, even he says they won't kill us. Let's run!'

"So we ran. Lay low under a shed...

"Well then, it began to get dark. We're lying there. A German set fire to one shed, with matches. Set fire to another – I can see him – also with matches. Two Germans are standing there in dark blue uniforms. I keep on lying there... I'm lying with my children, lying and they don't make a peep. Was it because – so's not to ruin me or something? The little tot didn't even cry! O! And so there I lie! And the roof there is burning. It burnt all up. And the Germans are standing there, two of them. Like dark blue posts. And the walls began to burn. And then the ground began to burn. The grass began to burn right at ground level. And I'm lying in the middle. I'm baking from both sides. It's thanks to that we used to weave cloth out of sheep's wool, fulled cloth. That's the kind of coat I'd put on. If I'd been wearing a blouse I would have burnt up. I just threw off my scarf – my plaits were all singed. And then my coat begins to scorch and burn, and I smother it with sand or whatever. My four-year-old girl is just shrie-king away! – got scorched, she did. And I'm squirming away, now this way, now that.

One more second and I'm done for! I'm just about done for. And they're standing right over there, the Germans. I didn't want to be killed lying down. I feel pushed to show myself to the Germans so they'll go ahead and kill me. There's no escape anyway – I'm baking. Let them kill me, I think. As soon as I get up to go to the Germans – two of them are standing there – the children began to wail and I plump down. So there I lie. I fell flat and go on lying there.

"I keep peeking out like this just a bit, to see if they've gone away or not. Flames are already starting to burn over here and over there. I look – the Germans are gone, they'd gone. And I lay another minute or so, let them get farther away, I thought. Then I grabbed all the children by their clothes, grabbed them and jerked them farther away, to the edge of the fire... Ooooh!...

"We're lying in Ostap's meadow. We're shaking, shaking so hard, oh!... And I thought: 'I'm the only one left in the whole village.' I finally turned to the children, lifted one up here – the two-year-old – another – the four-year-old girl – here, and the third followed behind. I walked and I walked and I walked...

"And where was I a-going?

"I was aiming for the road to Vygonishchi, for Vygonishchi. Where, I think, can I go? My mother is from Vygonishchi. I think: I have an uncle there; maybe he'll take me in. Because they might still finish us off, I think, in our village. Maybe we had to be bumped off. 'Partisan!...' they'd said. Maybe they'd figured we were in the collective farm in nineteen forty. 'Communist!...' they'd said against us. Maybe they were finishing us off for that. That's what!...

"So I up and went, walked toward Vygonishchi.

"I didn't make it.

"I'd stop and sit down somewhere on a stump...

I walked and walked... I'd fall down and my children'd fly over my head! 'A-ah' – but they only rubbed their heads. They didn't even cry. They sure had their fill of grief."

Into the woman's story breaks a quite recent memory, the sparse words of retired collective farmer **Andrei Evkhimovich Kuratnik**, who had said that morning in the township of Telekhany:

"...But my son was left alive. Among the corpses. My mother, when she was shot down, fell on top of him and covered him a bit. The lad was wounded in the side. He crawled about fifty metres away from the pit and fell asleep. They came the next day – gave five more shots into the pit. And he lay in a haystack for so many days. Was nine years old. Without drinking or eating. Some partisans found him and let me know..."

Barbara continues:

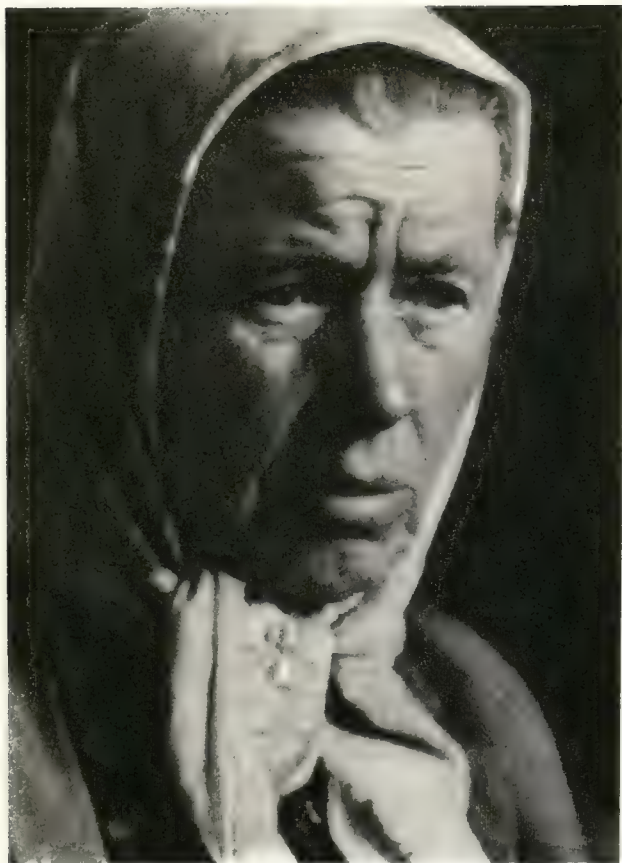
"...We got to Vygonishchi. It was Sunday already. It was the next Sunday, that week had already passed. I came and my uncle, my mother's brother, had already been shot.

"'Here I was going to complain,' I thought, 'sure he'll take pity on me now...'

"Uncle's wife, she says: 'Oooh, maybe you shouldn't be living in this world, really ought to run into the fire yourself. You have lots of children, and you're pregnant to boot – what will you do now as winter's coming!...'

"They themselves went off into the woods to hide, but they didn't take me. And I lay there in that house and then, as we did in the old days, I'd begin to pray: 'Give me, o Lord, sweet sleep! Either that I should remain alive, or grant that I not hear anything, that I just pass away with these children, just fall asleep forever...'

"Some partisans came out of the woods, from



Barbara Slesarchuk

Berezina, a strong, strong detachment. There was a man I knew from Vyada, he talked with me some, he said: 'Don't be afraid,' he says, 'we won't let the Germans kill you...'

"We waited and the next Sunday came.

"‘Auntie,’ I says to my uncle’s wife, ‘here’s what kind of a dream I had. A bad, bad one! I dreamt I was going from yard to yard. I’d gathered a small bag of bread. I walked and walked, and everything was going black before my eyes. I’d go into a house, pass five, and go into another. Such a pity I left so much bread of my own. And my old man, and the cattle. We didn’t have a horse, but we had bulls. Had three cows: two cows and a heifer. They drove them toward Khotenichi, toward Gantsevichi, in that direction. Oh how much grief I’ve known, how much I’ve seen... Too much!’

"My auntie, my uncle’s wife, says: ‘Well, I slept fine...’

"Honestly, what a woman! Wouldn’t give a scrap of kindling for cooking. ‘Go into the bushes,’ she says. That’s what kind of people there are, Lord! She was nasty, she was, rich, mighty rich! You’d ask for a pot — she wouldn’t give it.

"And I went back and forth to Krasnitsa and brought back honey for her and me. And I thought: ‘Let the bees... Maybe I’ll die.’ Really and truly, I’d wrap myself in some kind of rags. And there was so much honey, honey, honey!... I lugged it along in a pail from Krasnitsa. That was when they burnt it down. I just stroll along in there. Maybe they’ll kill me, I thought. If they didn’t kill me then, they won’t kill me now. It was already three days since they’d finished killing people off. I got a pail of honey and was now looking for a place to live. We had been there a week already and she, my uncle’s wife, was saying: ‘Look for lodging. So that because of you the Germans won’t kill us, too...’

"I found lodging at Lobanovich's place at Alexei's mother's, in a poor woman's house.

"I thought to myself: 'I'll go and get some potatoes and beans.'

"I went to get them, went in to Krasnitsa.

"But the children stayed there, in Vygonishchi.

"I'm carrying back the stuff, reach the hill — oh me, oh my! — Vygonishchi's on fire! Vygonishchi's on fire, and the machine-guns are rattling away! Vygonishchi's on fire! The wind is so strong it could knock a body off his feet. They came in from Bobrovichi, from that end, from the bridge. And the wind — it just ripped along! Flung the fire across ten houses.

"I'm crying.

"My children are off my hands now. Where are my children?..."

"And I started to run toward Berezina, where all the people had run. I found a woman and asked: 'Maybe you saw my children?'

"She says: 'We did. They ran away. That Nastya put Vasil on her shoulders, carried him to Berezina, far away!...'

"So I went there, too. I looked and looked, starting maybe at twelve, and found them as the sun was already setting. I found them. I found both mine and the Bartanov children, five of them. I found them, and a shed had burnt down, so I baked potatoes in the embers and fed them, those other children and mine...

"And I thought: where can I go?

"I went into the swamp. Sat there. I even found matches and barked some trees to weave bast shoes, and there I sat in Nadlevo, about three kilometres from Vygonishchi and four from Bobrovichi. I even found the place where I had made hay with my husband, where our meadowlands were. I just couldn't bear it, I felt so bad... I thought: I'll go over to somebody else's stacks, I just can't stand it here where I mowed and raked

hay with my husband...

"I went over to some other stacks and sat there.

"I started to peel some potatoes. And just at that moment Germans come running!... People are yelling all over the swamp.

"I think: what are they yelling for? Just for the fun of it, maybe?... Or maybe a mother has lost her children or some children have lost their mother and are looking for her?...

"O-oh! All of a sudden two police come flying out toward me. They sprang out from behind a bush and grabbed me! They grabbed me all right. And they asked my little lad, my eight-year-old: 'Sonny, where's your pa?'

"He ain't, they killed my pa.'

"The Germans had killed my Roman, you see.

"Sir. I will curl up and die of hunger and cold myself, just don't you kill me. I don't want you to kill me. Let me and the kids lay down and die ourselves...

"He says: 'Where are the other people?'

"They ran toward the forest.'

"Get into the cart!'

"And they went away.

"If I'd gone to that cart, to that Bobrovichi police that finished everyone off, that showed where they had hidden, he would have shot me, killed me. He killed a powerful lot of Bobrovichi people. But I didn't fall into his hands. They went away beyond the bushes and I also got behind the bushes. You can't see me, and I can't see you! And I ran to this dark meadow — this meadow with reeds in it, ferns, all kinds of things in it... I ran in there and lay low. I lay there. They had tracked all the people down, it had already grown quiet...

"Only the partisans ran past. They ran past and gave my children some boiled meat. My children ate their fill — now they wanted water!... The one who was two goes: 'Water, water, water, water!...'

"This year between 20 and 30 million people will die from hunger in Russia. This might even be good, for some peoples must be reduced."

Goering, 1941





"But the water had dried up, a metre down maybe, and there was nowhere you could get a drink. It was getting dark. Now it's the other boy, the eight-year-old..."

"Go," I says to him, 'and pee in the pot.'

"He had a drink."

"No," he said, 'Mom, it isn't good water. Go look for some good water! Go!...'

"There wasn't any water anywhere. He cried and cried, that boy did. I lay down. There were even matches, I could have lit a fire. O!... 'Give me some water,' he cried. It's the truth I'm telling you. I dug this little hole, dug it up. 'If a person lies on damp earth,' I thought, 'he'll die.' I tore up the moss, tore it out. Because they were little. 'How will I feed you, how will I clothe you?...' And I dug a little pit in the swamp right down to the turf and we all lay down in it. Now for sure he'll get sick, catch pneumonia, he'll depart this life, at least one will be off my hands..."

"And he's alive! Didn't even get the least bit sick!"

"And I came back out of that swamp."

"Come on, children," I says, 'let's go to Telekhany, let them kill us off.'

"The children didn't want to."

"Take us wherever in the world you want, Mom, only we won't go to those Germans and polizeis!..."

"I found lodgment in Velikaya Gat. They set fire to Velikaya Gat, too... At that time I was already with the partisans. I sat for hours and dried grass, wrapped the kiddies in grass. I ruined my health, got rheumatism. There you are!..."

"I brought up my children, brought them all up. They're working in offices all over the place. The kids are scattered around the world and I'm all by myself... I am thankful that they're already giving me a pension. I looked after the sheep, reared thousands of little lambs, worked ten years on the farm. My children worked."

"There I've told you all my suffering. Maybe I said something I shouldn't? I'm illiterate. Excuse me..."

Mother and Son, Son and Mother

I

Kopyl District, Minsk Region. It is hard even to call Rulyovo a village, for it consists of only three houses standing at the edge of the woods, but it, too, has a monument to the victims of yet another punitive expedition of 1943.

Lizaveta Iosifovna Kubrak is sixty six, a feeble old woman with a cane. She told her story calmly enough, but she warned us: "Don't be afraid if I cry out in pain; I have rheumatism..."

"...They said a punitive detachment was coming. Many people had come here from Pesochnoye to hide. They, the Germans, did not travel along the road but through the swamps: they wanted to catch them all. So they came and found many strangers. And those people had decided that if a punitive detachment came we would say they were from this village... There was a large collective-farm threshing-floor, and the land was already divided up then, and so they decided that we'd all thresh there. Our men went there to thresh and those from Pesochnoye went, too.

"And the Germans, when they came, asked for the family in each house, who were the inhabitants of the house. We lived with our aunt, we didn't have a house of our own. My husband, my son and I. And auntie had two daughters.

"My husband and son had also gone there to thresh. The people inside the barn wanted to hide in the holes, but didn't have time. The Germans opened the doors. Some managed to grab a flail and pretended to be threshing, and some didn't... And in the houses they, the Germans, asked: 'Where are the men?' And my auntie said they'd gone threshing. And two women from Pesochnoye, teachers they were, were sitting on the

stove, I had told them: 'You might at least knit something...' The Germans ask: 'Where is the mistress of the house?'

"And auntie says: 'I have two daughters, and my nephew is also living here with his wife, and they have a son.'

"And who are these two?'

"She says they're from Pesochnoye.

"And why are they here with you?'

"She says: 'My girls live here, and they came with their distaffs to spin.'

"What else can she say?'

"They turn to me: 'Where's your husband?'

"They needed the men. I say: 'They're threshing over there in the threshing-barn.'

"Go call him.'

"I went and called him.

"You a partisan?' he asks.

"And he says: 'Sir, what kind of a partisan am I? Just ask the mistress of the house, we live together.

"They were both Germans and polizeis.

"And who are those?'

"He says: 'They're from Pesochnoye. Auntie here has two daughters, they're friends, and so they came here.'

"And the Germans ask my husband: 'When did they come?'

"He says: 'Today.'

"But they'd said: 'We've been living here a whole week.'

"Their stories weren't the same. They believed them, and not him. There was this sturdy birch stick, better than mine here, and with a knob.

"And they started to beat him... And they beat him so much that he was just black all over. And the one put the stick aside and said to the other: 'Shoot him.'

"I see that things are in a bad way and begin to plead: 'Sir, it's not true — they came today. Go

and look: they're from Pesochnoye, they came to everyone, not just to us. There are twenty people, fifteen in some houses, and their horses stand harnessed, and there are many of them in the threshing-barn, too...

"So they went to see.

"And evening fell.

"Auntie had a big house, and about fifty of them gathered in it. They brought in straw. And we settled down in the kitchen. We and the carters that had brought them sat down on the floor near the stove. And I asked one of those men, one of the carters: 'Tell me, please, where are they, what do they do in the places they come to?'

"They say: 'Nothing.'

"But another one says: 'In Pesochnoye, you mean? They killed a little girl and burnt down a house...'

"Well, I was filled with dark thoughts once they said that.

"We didn't have to wait long before they came and asked in Polish: 'Where is the master of the house?'

"And he's sitting next to me. He says: 'Here I am.'

"Come on, get going!...

"Since they had said they'd shoot him, I figured they were taking him to be shot.

"He got up and said: 'Farewell, all of you.'

"I didn't know where they took him.

"A little later we see the orphanage is on fire. I think: that's probably where they took him. That's where they killed him...

"It was still quiet the next morning, but I kept feeling things would be bad.

"We had a little shed there, where the heifer and pig were. And I said to my son: 'Let's go there. In case of anything, we'll head for the woods.'

"No sooner had we reached it than there was a shot. We had a hole made in the shed, and my

son says: 'Mummy, I'll crawl in there.'

"No, you'd better crawl on top and I'll come after,' I says.

"He starts to crawl, and just then two Germans come in... I grab him by the legs. They're mumbling the devil knows what. And I says to them: 'Sir, I'm feeding the cow.'

"They're speaking German. And they start shoving us, my son and me. Our little shed stood here, and over there was the large barn where they were threshing, the men. The doors were already open. And such thick snowflakes began to fall! So they, the Germans, one grabbed him and the other grabbed me. They pushed us into that barn. And fired two shots. My son ran ahead and I fell. I just fell, they didn't wound me. I wasn't hurt. But my son seemed to have been hit, killed on the spot. The thought flashed through my head..."

QUESTION: "And how old was he?"

"He was fourteen.

"The barn began to burn... Seven families stored their sheaves there. Everything was all mixed up in there... When I fell down I also pulled some straw over me. When the straw began to burn I realized I was lying next to the wall, beneath the little window through which the threshing machine's driving belt ran. I raise myself to that little window and peek out — they're standing there. A building is burning in front, and this barn is burning... There was also a big window opening out onto where the threshing machine stood under a penthouse, but it was crossed with barbed wire. I tried one coil — you can still see the wounds here — one coil was fastened with a nail, and that tore loose, but the other, with a bolt — no way. That was that — you couldn't crawl out! If I'd been in a normal state, but I was all...

"And at that moment my son goes: 'Mummy, are you alive?' (*She cries.*)

"I says: 'I'm alive.'



“He’s rearing to go. He was wearing a short sheepskin coat, he threw it off. His hat was burning on him, and his little jacket, too... (*She cries.*) I grabbed some snow and began to rub him, to put out the fire on him. And he’s trying to break loose and run. And I say ‘Sonny, they’re still standing there!...’”

QUESTION: “Had you already left the barn?”

“No, we were in the barn. There was a driving wind, the doors were open, it was throwing in lots of snow and we were standing at the very doors...”

“At that moment they walk off, those Germans, because other buildings are burning and lots of smoke is rising from them.

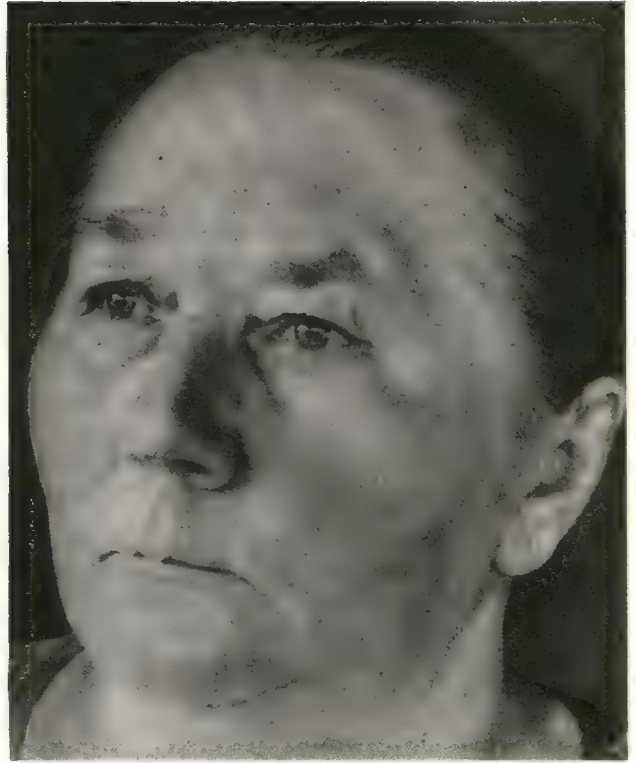
“And we go out after them — as close behind as from you to me. How could they not have looked

back? There is some sort of fate in the world... The penthouse near the barn wasn’t covered. The barn had burnt down, but the penthouse was left. And we went in there. And we only heard shouting, much shooting and shouting...”

“My son could run, but I couldn’t. ‘Mummy, you’re wounded.’ I said I wasn’t. But where did the blood come from? My hand here was all torn. I hadn’t felt it. So he could run, but I couldn’t. There was this big tree there, a cut-off spruce. A lot of snow had blown up against it. He wanted to pull me at least to that spruce, into the snow. But how could he drag me all that way! He was fourteen. So I said: ‘Sonny, save yourself, I don’t care what happens to me anymore...’

“We got even farther and lay there for a bit, in the pit where they used to get sand from. And

Lizaveta Kubrak



then we went into that copse over there. We walked from early morning, all day, and spent the night there... He didn't have any clothes on either, only his little jacket on him. I was wearing a warm sweater so I took it off and put it on him. He was just a child. We walked and walked, and wherever we went there were Germans... There weren't any, but they appeared to us all the same, in white robes. Out of fear. Just before daybreak the cocks crowed. We came out to the edge of the woods and saw Germans... But there weren't any at all! People were just coming to gather the bodies, but there weren't any of them... And we'd reached such a point that we just wanted to sleep – that's all. From the cold. Sleep. But I knew that as soon as we sat down – that would be it... We broke off some spruce branches, laid them on the snow and

I sat down and took him in my lap. As soon as he begins to fall asleep, I shake him like this... (*She shows how she roused him.*) Only the branches in the trees are cracking and falling. But we're afraid even of that...

"Toward morning we came out to the edge of the woods, and wherever we looked, everywhere we thought we saw Germans walking...

"They didn't kill my husband. They took him in a cart to show them where this village Svinka was. There were these self-defenders there. And there in Svinka lived my mother. They also wanted to go to some place called Koshachi Brod, wanted him to take them there. But they were told not to go because the partisans would kill them at night. Then they let my husband go. And he went to my mother. And Mother didn't let him leave,

because our Rulyovo was already on fire...

"This my mother told me after my son and I came to Svinka.

"Mother said that my husband said, when he left Svinka to see if we were alive: 'If they're gone, I won't come back either...' A woman in just her stockings came running through the snow from Rulyovo and said that she had seen us being led away and heard two shots, but what had happened to us she didn't know... He looked for our bones and didn't find them...

"My mother harnessed up the horse and drove to Rulyovo. He was crying, and Mother said: 'They're alive, they've already come to us!'

"Then we lived with Mother. I turned black, real dark. For more than a year I wasn't normal. 'Germans, Germans!...' Wherever I hid, wherever I went — everywhere there were Germans... Dressed in white, in white... I couldn't do anything bent over, only standing... I got meningitis, high blood pressure — I've been suffering with it all my life...

"This month it will be nine years since my son died. My Rostya. He left six grandchildren... They're in the orphanage, the four youngest..."

II

In Novoye Selo, Borisov District, Minsk Region, **Mikhas Nikolayevich Verkhovodka** told us how his native Budenichi was razed in the spring of 1944.

Mikhas Verkhovodka is forty years old. He was alone in the house, but from the paintings on the wall one sensed the presence of children. And he told us afterwards that it was his daughter who drew so well.

He is a mild-mannered man, with a voice almost as gentle as a woman's. Maybe that is why he

remembers everything in such detail, like a woman. He told his tale willingly, as though he had at last found the occasion he had been waiting for.

"...For two days the rain had poured down... Now everyone came out... Nobody had anything to eat, the people were hungry. We sat down, the sun warmed us — everyone sat down right where they were.

"And I sat there and didn't doze off or anything. Of course I was still a child. Suddenly I saw a German coming. I just said: 'Hey, a German's coming!...'

"He was a big one, with a tommy-gun.

"My sister was there. My brother was killed right there on the spot. As soon as I said: 'A German's coming!', my sister made for the woods. My sister-in-law was also around — she also headed for the woods. And her kids ran after her.

"As for us we just all got up. Stood up straight.

"A cow was tethered there. He sent a burst of gunfire in that direction. The cow was hit. It made for the woods. And then collapsed. Its legs began to jerk something awful... Until it died.

"He set off a flare — whoosh! It grew just black with them. They ran out of the forest and completely surrounded us, from all sides — these guys with a cross here on the sleeve and dressed in black.

"They lined us up. Began to taunt us. They lined up the men separately from the women. And they began to beat the men.

"Where are your weapons, you bandits?"

"Here, under their chins, they shoved... carbines or the devil knows what. I held on to my mother's skirt. I already understood some, you know, I'd already finished first grade.

"So they killed those men, as many as they wanted, drove them about fifty metres to the side

and a machine-gunner lay down... Mortar men lay down on either side.

"And I still had a child's way of thinking – wanted to see how the mortar shell would fly. One of them was lying there, and the other came over from the side and – whirr! I saw it all – the mortar shell flying and plopping down there, coming down over there in the little birch grove. I know the place even today. Only now it's changed of course, many years have passed.

"They killed those men and the women set up a howl. They machine-gunned them – how could they get away on a bare meadow? Three machine-guns. Just mowed them down! My brother was there, too, Vasil. His wife and children were with us.

"One of them, this German, comes flying over here. They wanted to drive us into the birch grove, one corner of it was left. Some officer drove up and said: 'No!' Or however he said it. They changed their plan. Suddenly they began to pound with the mortar – two lads were coming. Young lads, they were maybe seventeen then or eighteen. The Germans left us for the time being. There was crying. The children were crying...

"But I didn't cry, somehow controlled myself, I was just interested... And yet I knew I was going to my death!...

"Well then. They busied themselves with those lads. Beat them as much as they pleased. Naturally, they had the strength on their side, and those were helpless. They took those lads into that little birch grove where we were to be killed. So they somehow got them down and machine-gunned them.

"Then that guy of theirs, some senior officer apparently, came over and said: 'To Budenichi!'

"Well, they began to drive us in that direction.

"We moved on a bit, and our sister-in-law's eldest lad made a break. But the younger one, Gen-

ka, he stayed behind. He came back here where they nabbed us.

"When they made me move along, some rag was lying there in a knot, there was a chunk of bread in it. I hitched it onto my shoulders. And he said to me: 'Don't take it, you won't be needing it.'

"And so I tossed it right back.

"They'd driven us about fifty metres when a child ran off. The escort was walking behind. He said... An old woman was walking in back, and he said to her: 'Bring him over here!'

"That little kid. She went. If she'd been a smart old woman she would have gone after that little kid and made for the woods. Who the hell devil would have run after her, because we would have run in all directions. But she went and took that child by the hand and brought him over to us in the column. We walk on. Mother says to me: 'Sonny, crawl into the bushes.'

"'Mummy,' I says, he'll just run me through with his bayonet!..."

"I already knew what was what. I was in my tenth year. Or eleventh already. I started first grade when I was nine: I was somehow small for my age.

"Well then. I didn't crawl into the bushes. They drove us into the dug-outs. Some old women went into the first dug-out. We went off about thirty metres – and those first ones were already being – dr-dr-dr-dr! The dug-out was on fire. Who'd go into the other one now? People were standing rooted to the spot. And they had these sticks – either they cut them or they were given them, the devil only knows. They beat people from behind there...

"I see my mother going into that dug-out first of all. Well, if Mummy went, I have to, too. I darted in right after her. She suddenly went in – there were two partitions in there made of logs. Some-

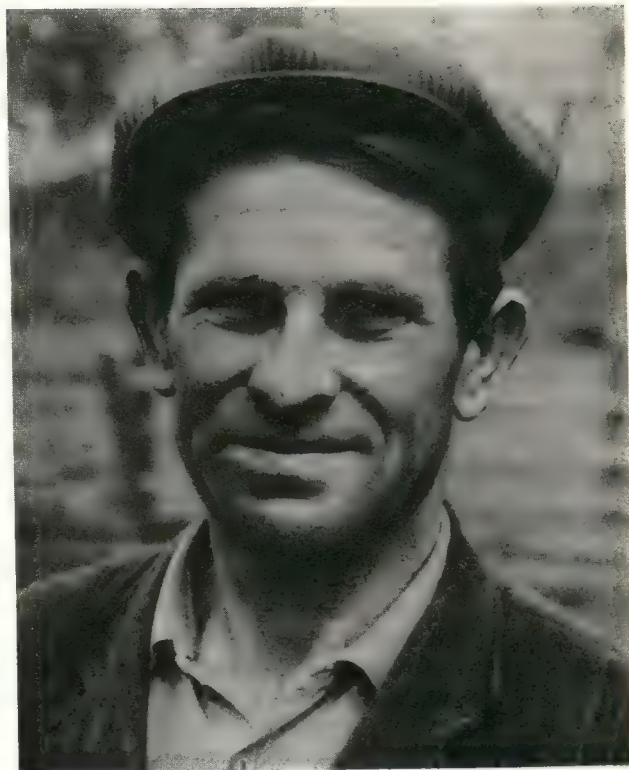
one had dumped potatoes behind them or something. She lay down there like this somehow. (*He shows how.*) And I sat down. There was also an old woman... Perhaps they threw them in — who knows. We didn't see. Maybe my mother was hit first and so she dashed in there... More and more people kept crawling in and — children and old women. I sat down and this thought popped into my head: 'I know they'll kill me, so let them kill me with Mummy.' He just stood in the doorway... Began to fumble around with the tommy-gun for some reason. He began to clank and at that moment I darted behind Mummy. I lay down like this, waiting to feel how the bullet would go into me... I didn't realize yet — thought it would gnaw away like a little worm, that bullet. I lay like that for a minute maybe. He began to shoot — dr-r-r!... He shot away... My sister-in-law — my brother was killed there, in the meadow — had a little baby tied to her chest, and it just bawled out whu-a, whu-a...

"That was all. It was all over.

"He carries over some straw, into the dug-out. I can hear it's straw... I'm alive, see. He dumped in the straw and lit it. This smoke poured out. I lay there all squinched up. The straw burnt up.

"Well then. Then straw burnt up, they went off and after a couple of minutes threw in a grenade. The grenade exploded. And all that stuff — the logs, some kind of barrel that was lying there, bits of metal — it all came down on top of us. It landed in the doorway there. Those that were killed were blown up. They threw in another. But that one I hardly heard. Like some kind of shot, like a pistol shot. I could still hear it. I don't know if Mother heard or not...

"Well then. We lay there... How long did we lie there?... I hear my mother is breathing, she's alive!... I beg her: 'Mummy, don't breathe.' It was so terrifying for a little child like me that



Mikhas Verkhovodka



A partisan enclave. Lake Palik

I said: 'Mummy, don't breathe.'

"Well then. They came up and began to count, you know: ein, zwei, drei, vier, sechs..."

"Some girls were driving by... Cows were mooing. I would have got up and gone, if only they wouldn't have touched me... They were already retreating, those Germans. Going toward Usokhi. And the polizeis with them. The cows are mooing and the girls are singing at the top of their lungs..."

QUESTION: "Who were those girls?"

"How should I know? I'm lying there. I just heard the earth going thud-thud-thud, so I tried to get up. Mother didn't get up. I stand up and all I hear is the earth going thud-thud-thud."

"I say: 'Mummy, they're coming again!'"

"I kept scaring her. And I myself was afraid..."

"I'll tell you one more thing... I left it out."

A man come over to that dug-out, where the people that were killed were, saying: 'There are mines set here.'

"I heard him say it. What distance were they away? But I couldn't peek: couldn't move at all. Those Germans didn't come in, they went away. Then two more Germans come. The people were killed by the grenades, all of them. And they are clank-clanking around there with something. Metal... And talking together: ger-ger, ger-ger!... And we can't hold our breath that long! I'm lying like this with my nose in the earth, and my mother is lying a little on one side. How are you going to hold your breath! They lingered around for a long time. Clank-clank-clank!... Mother went and sneezed... And one of them heard it."

"'Something's breathing!...' Sometimes they spoke German, and sometimes Russian. 'Something's breathing!'"

"And the other says: 'Who can be breathing here? Look, arms and legs are lying about, who can be breathing here?...'"

QUESTION: "So they spoke sometimes in German and sometimes in Russian?"

"Between themselves they spoke German, but those words they said in Russian."

"Well then. I heard that, little boy that I was, as I lay there. They immediately shot out of there and left. Maybe they got scared or something..."

"It grew quiet. It was all over. They ran up to have a look ... those that drove off later. Carters or something."

"We're lying there. Evening began to fall. It had been around lunch-time when they took us from there, from that place where we were. Evening now began to fall. They had probably left a sentry in Budenichi, a machine-gunner or two. And a few partisans ran into that post. They were walking along boldly, too, those lads, and came up against it. A fight started up. Such a fight that those Germans all began to fire at Budenichi from over where they were."

"And we're lying there. We were still afraid, you know. By now my mother had come to her senses. She says: 'Sonny, crawl out!...'"

"They had come to their senses, began firing off cannons from Usokhi or from Ikani over there."

"'If a shell hits us, sonny, it will kill us.'"

"But I had something else on my mind."

"'But Mummy, they've set mines!'"

"I had heard them talking. I didn't understand what these mines were and how they were set. I says: 'Mummy, they set mines... I'll blow up...'"

"And she says: 'Crawl out, sonny, if a shell hits us we'll be killed.'"

"Well, so I crawled out. Through those people — wriggle, wriggle, wriggle — I crawled out over them. I stood in the doorway and looked, and these Germans were running our way. Ger-ger-ger... Coming this way. It was already pretty dark. They sent up this great big flare, a rocket and it grew as bright as daylight. I hid by the doorway,

next to the dug-out, and stood there. And I said: 'Mummy, hurry up! Hurry up, Mummy!...'

"Well, Mummy was older and she'd lain there for too long... 'I'd get up,' she said later, 'and collapse, get up, and collapse...' And she was wet. We were all wet from the rain. Then she got moving.

"As soon as she crawled out I started to run. Simply had no fear. How can you be afraid when you're already running away? I ran and as luck would have it landed in a field of rye. About twenty metres away. A strip of rye. I wait in the rye.

"'Hurry up, Mummy! Hurry up, Mummy!'

"But she's just crawling along... I wait for her and run on. And she catches up with me again. We came out into that meadow again... Ran out into the water-meadow – you could see everything: they were sending off these rocket flares. And machine-guns and tommy-guns were slicing the air!...

"She said: 'They'll kill us.'

"I said: 'It's all the same now, I'll make a run for it. If they kill me, you sit tight!...'

"And I ran, shot like a ball of lightning across that water-meadow. I ran up to the forest... And now I began to worry, to be afraid. As luck would have it we had come upon that place they had taken us from... Why had we gone precisely here?... I waited for my mother, she came running. Sheets, everything was scattered about... There in that spot she found a round pot, some dry bread, five slices maybe, and a little bag of salt. Someone

had had some left. She took it. And I kept piping: 'Hurry up, Mummy! Hurry up, Mummy!'

"Having gotten away from such a horror.

"Well then. Where could we go?... We didn't know the forest and night had already fallen, it was dark. We walked maybe fifty metres, and maybe more. And then we lay down and slept oh so well...

"That night, as we were walking, a mole would be digging up his hill, and I would already think it was mines... And I'd say: 'Mummy, a mine!'

"And we'd skirt it, that molehill. Then we lay down under a spruce tree. We woke up and it was already lunch-time – we'd slept so long!

"Well then. Now I started to say: 'Mummy, I want something to eat!'

"And she'd give me a crust of bread. I'd crunch on it a bit. As for where to go – we didn't know where to go. Into the woods, just farther into the woods, so's not to hit the edge anywhere.

"And so we walked along... And then we came upon some partisans. We walk up to them.

"'Where are you from?' one of them says.

"And I explain we'd run away from the Germans.

"They poured us a little cereal, this chopped wheat porridge. We became entirely different people: we'd had some hot food. And we went to Gorely Ostrov...

"And then our army came soon afterwards.

"Mummy and I went to where they had been killed, in Budenichi, and cried. They told us that my brother had been killed, too..."

A Whole District on Fire

By **JOHN J. HARRIS**

Editor, *San Francisco Chronicle*

San Francisco, California

San Francisco, California

San Francisco, California

San Francisco, California

San Francisco, California

San Francisco, California

San Francisco, California

San Francisco, California

San Francisco, California

San Francisco, California

San Francisco, California

San Francisco, California

San Francisco, California

San Francisco, California

San Francisco, California

San Francisco, California

San Francisco, California

San Francisco, California

San Francisco, California

San Francisco, California

San Francisco, California

San Francisco, California

San Francisco, California

San Francisco, California

San Francisco, California

In the museum of the township of Oktyabrsky, Gomel Region, one finds the following figures: “Before the war there were 32,000 inhabitants in Oktyabrsky District.

“In the late 1960s there were 25,000.”

The story is pretty much the same in Minsk Region, Vitebsk Region and other parts of Byelorussia.

From the very first days of the war the nazis began to carry out their plan of “depopulation”, of “freeing eastern territories of population”.

But it acquired a particularly sinister scope at the end of the first winter of the war in Oktyabrsky District.

In 1971 we chose Gomel Region as the site of our recordings because it was a dry summer. From our experience in Brest and Grodno Regions we knew that we would have to get to the most remote villages. And although it had been drained and somewhat raised by land improvement projects, this was still the swampy Polesye...

Even though you know that Byelorussia is an oil-producing republic, and has been so for many years now, you still, when you visit these parts, find your eyes stopping again and again on the derricks and enormous tanks — they are all so unusual here, amidst the luxuriant greenery.

A little to the side there are bound to be gas flares. You know their beauty is expensive, “uneconomical”, but you cannot help gazing at them.

And you gaze at them in a special way, with your own and at the same time not only your own eyes. You have the feeling that you have already seen this blaze under the Polesye sky before, but in those years it was nocturnal and alarming... One of us fought as a partisan right here in this area, but we are not concerned here with his personal memories, but with the memories we are

collecting, memories with which one inevitably soon identifies as with one's own.

People from villages of fire...

“I'm not from that one, but I'm also from a village of fire,” a peasant woman told us in Vitebsk Region. And how many Byelorussian villages there are which were frighteningly, horribly linked by fire. “I also...”

There are probably quite a few people who are prevented from falling asleep by the nocturnal reflections of peaceful gas flares in the oil-rich Polesye. Because at these moments they also see scenes like the following:

“...They set fire to us from the outside. They went and sprayed that club — and the club started to burn. And then one of us ... he went and hurled himself at the window, the sash, and flew out with his son. His son was of a height with him. And also a woman. As they flew out that window one after the other, well, the Germans, those that were lying by the railroad, let fly at them. They all ran, like a string of geese or something, one after the other, and so they all fell, those people. And I was behind, let myself fall out the window, and there was a ditch there, and some bushes... (**Teklya Yakovlevna Kruglova** from Oktyabrsky township.)

“...They set fire to Kovali. At that very moment. And these men crawl up onto the roof, look and see them catching children and throwing them into the fire...” (**Matruna Trofimovna Grinkevich** from the village of Kurin, Oktyabrsky District.)

“...That end of the village was occupied, but ours was still free. So we went to the settlement that is right at the edge of the forest. And then into the little alder thicket. And there we, about fifteen women maybe, lay in that alder thicket.

We just fell down and lay there. We didn't see them burn and kill, just heard — they screamed terribly, people screaming. We couldn't hear what one of them was saying there, only: 'A-a-a!' Only that voice going, that voice. And then that was all — everything went quiet..." (**Ganna Sergeyevna Paduta** from the village of Lavstyki, Oktyabrsky District.)

"...I crawled away, well, maybe about a hundred metres from the village and lay down in the rye field... I was quite far from them, from where they were burning them there — maybe four hundred metres or so... I lie there and listen, and over there — ta-ta-ta-ta — they're shooting them down, shooting them down with tommy-guns after getting them into a house... And then I see the houses are already burning, and the whole village was lit up. You could see everything, and it was already about to get dark... And then, when everything grew quiet, then I stood up in the field, went back to my yard and called, maybe there was someone somewhere. But no one answers, only the cattle lows and the cats meow and the dogs bark..." (**Katerina Danilovna Krot** from the village of Lozki, Kalinkovich District.)

All this is very close to our people, at the very tip of their memory and doesn't need calling up. "When everything just drags on," a woman in the village of Kostyukovich, Mozyr District, told us, "you think maybe it's finished already. But as soon as someone reminds you of it again like this, it seems it's starting all over again..."

When transposed to a map, the thousands of kilometres we traveled around Gomel Region stretch in a broken line passing through Gomel, Rechitsa, Kalinkovich, Mozyr, Lelchitsy, Petrikov, Kopotkevichi, Ozarichi, Oktyabrsky...

And if one thinks of it as a tree-trunk, its branches and boughs are formed by the villages we had to keep "branching off" to: Gorval, Glybov, Pervomaisk, Krynki, Liski, Alexichi, Lozki, Pribylovichi, Bolshiye Selyutichi, Tonezh, Koptsevichi, Novoselki, Velikoye Selo, Luchitsy...

There are especially many of these villages around Oktyabrsky — over thirty.

"Filtration", "action", "expedition" — it had different names in different parts of Byelorussia, but everywhere it meant one and the same thing: pre-planned mass extermination of the population.

Both Hitler and his confederates in the matter of brigandage and racist cannibalism spoke openly about many things. But they hid even more until the time "when it would be possible" (after their victory over their main enemies) to get down to a "final settlement".

Hitler:

"It is now important that we not disclose our goals to the whole world. Moreover, it is not at all necessary. The main thing is for us ourselves to know what we want... The motivation of our actions before the world must proceed from tactical considerations... And so we will again emphasize that we were forced to occupy a district, bring it to order and ensure its security. We were forced, in the interests of the population, to concern ourselves with the public order, provisions, transportation, etc. This is the origin of our control. Thus it must not be disclosed that a final settlement is concerned. Nevertheless, in spite of this and regardless of this, we will take all necessary measures — execution, evacuation and so on."¹★

And again:

"The Russians have now issued an order for

★ Numbered footnotes can be found at the end of the book.

a partisan war in our rear. This partisan war also has its advantages: it gives us the possibility of exterminating everything that opposes us.”²

Bormann:

“The danger that the population of the occupied eastern regions will multiply faster than was previously the case is very great... For this very reason we must take necessary measures...”³

Measures?... “Shoot everyone who so much as scowls!” screams Lance-Corporal Schickelgruber – Hitler. And Keitel translates this into the language of a general’s commands: “The Führer has ordered that the most drastic measures be set in train... In so doing it must be taken into account that on the said territories human life is worth nothing and an intimidating effect can be achieved only through unusual cruelty...”⁴

And it was here, in Oktyabrsky District, that the German regular troops began to take advantage of that convenient “possibility” of executing their old and chief “plan” under the guise of fighting the partisans.

For the military men and managerial personnel its “convenience” lay in the fact that the partisans, according to their reckonings, would as a result decrease in number and the locality would become “clean” and easy of access. But most important – there would be generally less of these Slavs, these Byelorussians, Russians, Ukrainians... As early as the beginning of 1941 in a speech in Wewelsburg, Himmler set forth the goal of the “Russian campaign” in the following figures: to shoot down the “Slav population” – every tenth person – in order to decrease their number by 30 million (as a start).⁵ Why not, indeed, begin in advance, without waiting for final victory, to “diminish the biological potential” of the eastern peoples? The business had already been started in the concentration and prisoner-of-war camps. Now it was to be extended to the

countryside as well, from which each nation draws its main “human resources”.

“The plan,” it was said at a conference in Hitler’s headquarters, “provides for the eviction of 75 per cent of the Byelorussian population from the territory it now occupies.”⁶

And the “eviction” began, from the first days of the war and occupation, with mass extermination, expulsion from the Byelaya Vezha Forest area and the Pripyat Swamps punitive operation in July and August of 1941. These measures assumed an even more horrible scope at the start of 1942 – in Oktyabrsky District. Here they began with the village of Khvoinya. True, the village was part of the neighbouring Kopatkevichi District, but on the German maps it allegedly fell under Oktyabrsky District. And that’s why they began with it. The schedule, instructions, plan were all fulfilled with sinister pedantry. They came and killed 1,350 people. Why? Because on their map Khvoinya was part of Oktyabrsky District. That is how both the polizeis and the Germans themselves explained the matter. These explanations were supposed to maintain the belief, the hope, in the local population that people were exterminated and punished for a “fault”, and not “indiscriminately”. The nazis, understandably enough, did not want people to run off into the woods. How would they ever get hold of them then! And so they “explained”. They destroyed Alexichi, a large village near Khoiniki, and spread the rumour that it had all been a mistake, that this was not the village they wanted, that it was another Alexichi in an entirely different district which was actually “guilty”! They annihilated Lozki and again it was the same story: they had wanted Golyavichi, for some partisans had blown up a train near there, closer to Golyavichi. Here in Lozki there had been a slight mistake!...

Not only these dreadful deeds, but also these

idiotic “explanations” showed time and time again that Khvoinya and Lozki and Alexichi and the whole of Oktyabrsky District and hundreds of other villages in other districts were wiped out, destroyed, for the sole “fault” that in them lived Soviet citizens, whom the nazis had not the slightest hope of “re-educating” into submissive slaves. And therefore their main task was to “evict” them! And what this meant, Khvoinya was one of the first to experience, followed by almost all the villages in Oktyabrsky District.

There were then over three hundred farmsteads in Khvoinya. Today there are sixty – new ones. And the people living in the village are newcomers, too. The sixty houses are scattered in disorderly fashion over the sandy knolls. We walked over the sand to the common graves in which the former Khvoinya – 1,350 persons – is buried...

This account by husband and wife **Mikolai Ivanovich** and **Volga Pilipovna Repchik** describes what they did to these people.

“...Well then, we got up early and looked out the window,” begins Mikolai Ivanovich. “They were like a dark storm-cloud on the other side of the stream. Where they were going the devil only knew. Many people rushed into the woods, mostly men. The women and children stayed. Well, many men stayed, too. What happened? They came, surrounded the village, occupied it from one end and begin to drive people – children, grown-ups, old people. Those who couldn’t walk they didn’t drive from their house. They stayed there. I was crippled then, my leg was broken and I was in a cast. Well, I think, what will be will be. I see them chasing people. They separated off the men from the women and children. They drove the men into the barn and set it on fire: I can see the fire rising. I see them driving the women and children in batches down the hill. And the barn is

burning. The one that is farther off. And they’re driving them into the other one. They finished driving them in, closed the doors, doused it with gasoline and set it on fire. All this I can see through the window. I says to my family: ‘You know what – scatter in all directions. Only don’t hide inside buildings, but where there are logs or stumps. Also don’t hide in haystacks, they’ll set fire to them and we’ll burn.’

“What do those women do? They got scared. And I had a dug-out. Here was the house and here was the dug-out a ways from the house. I told them, and myself followed in their footsteps, because they forgot about me, that I was there, too. So I took hold of my rope, hitched onto it – I had this rope – got off the bed, wrapped my leg up somehow and went. I crawl outside and look to see where they’ve gone. I see they’ve made for the dug-out. I crawled over there. But the Germans didn’t get as far as my house. And that’s how we were left.

“Those who were inside somewhere were killed, burnt in their houses. They’d go into a house, people would be lying there, and they’d shoot those who tried to run away. Bullocks are wandering around, cows are wandering around, pigs are squealing, the village is on fire. There aren’t any people. They drive the herd through the village, drive out the cattle.

“I hey chased the men over the sand first, wore them out, and only then drove them into the barn. They took the women gradually, in batches. But they chased the men so they’d be weak and unable to resist.

“They burnt us in forty-two, just before spring. They were SS men. With skulls...”

His wife, **Volga Pilipovna**, has her own tone, her own slant on everything; hers is a very lively and spontaneous personality. Yes, Volga really

did forget about her old man. She herself talks about it: she saw what was going on, and she had children on her hands!... All the same she did yell at her husband and the other men in a quite unwomanly fashion: "You so-and-sos, what are you sitting, lying around for, the Germans are right here!..."

"And I have two children, see, one in one arm and the other in the other. I say it openly, I didn't even glance at that old man of mine. Grabbed the children — and forgot about him. And he came and cussed..."

And then for a long time we listened to **Volga Andreyevna Minich**, whose tragedy was only just beginning on that terrible day in Khvoinya. It dragged on for many more days, far beyond the confines of Khvoinya itself.

Kurin, Vezhin, Oktyabsky, Kovali, Zatishye... Volga Minich's agonizing journey and the torments of all these villages became intertwined in one awful whole. She walked, ran and crawled through the entire burning Oktyabsky District, trying to save the man she loved.

Now this woman is a little over fifty.

But at that time she was twenty-one, happily married and expecting her first child. And everything would have been all right, normal...

Would have been... Had it not been for the war and nazi occupation...

She began her story and the mistress of the household, Volga Repchik, who had at first hindered rather than helped her deliberate "old man" Mikola describe that March day, and had then hastened to speak for herself, now fell silent, fully trusting her younger neighbour's competence.

The latter talked and from time to time, without interrupting her tale, began to cry.

Volga Repchik quietly disappeared into the bedroom behind the partition and returned with

a clean handtowel, which she laid on her neighbour's lap.

"...Two columns advanced on our village on Sunday: one great big column from Koptsevichi, the other from Luchitsy. The one and the other column met, agreed on everything and began to enter the village. They set sentries literally ten metres apart. Surrounded the whole village. And afterwards they began to go into every house.

"They looked in on us, too. How many of us were there? Mikita had two girls, we... There were eight people in the house. And we were all sick with typhus then. Only father had gotten over it, and he was sitting at the table. When they came in, we were all lying side by side. They say: 'Typhus?' And to the old man..."

"'Get dressed and come out!..."

"And he, poor thing, got ready and went. Ours was the last house.

"We saw our neighbour, Katya Vladimirova, carry out her baby, but he said to her, the German: 'Put back the baby.'

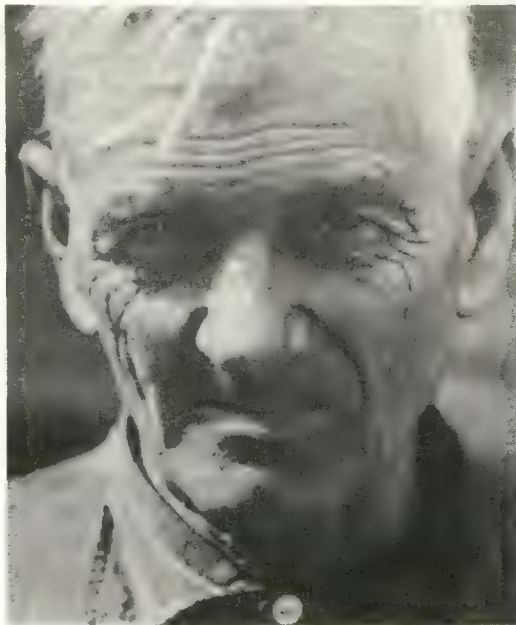
"She carried it into the house and put it in the cradle but took the other children with her. Who were older and could walk.

"And our people keep walking by... And soon there're no more people, only the sentries standing there. And then carters appeared, in carts. They drive along, open up the houses and take what was left there in the house.

"And this other woman and I said: 'Let's walk out of the village and see where those people got to.'

"We had just begun to walk there, climbed the hill, and already people were screaming there and we saw fire. Three or so people from Khvoinya were partisans. So we thought they were burning the partisans' families. We walked on farth-





Khvoinya rebuilt

Volga and Mikolai Repchik

er — no! The screaming was very loud. People were shrieking so loud that we guessed...

"I ran into the house and said: 'Run for your lives! They're slaughtering everyone!...'"

"We start running about the house — some of us were really sick, others had just pretended to be — but we can't get out: there are already sentries all around. There's no way you can get out of the house — they're standing right outside the window. We see that even the carters have already disappeared, and four men are walking toward us — tall, and bones are painted right on them. They were leading straight for the house.

"My mother-in-law, my husband's mother, ran out of the house.

"'Oh kind sirs!...' she cried.

"She wanted to beg for mercy, but they just shot her outside the window. With a revolver. We saw that she had been shot and all ran together like this in one heap. And we had two people that couldn't even walk because of typhus. They were mighty sick with typhus, couldn't even get up. We dragged them all onto one pillow.

"And they walked into the house.

"'Typhus? Typhus?...' They asked and immediately turned back.

"Then they set us on fire. Some kind of black bottle. And they didn't even light the fire — just doused the house and it started to burn. They closed the door, smashed the window and began throwing in grenades. Chucked in one, a second, a third...

"...Well, my neighbour said that as soon as they threw a grenade into their house, they jumped up barefoot and ran off. They were also lying in bed. There was smoke from the grenade and soot. When they had thrown four grenades, she ran away in the smoke, only managed to shout: 'My darling children, scatter in all directions, run for your lives!...'"

"Both she herself ran off, and her children did. They fired at them with a machine-gun, but it seems it was their fate to survive, and so they survived...

"Well, they threw grenades at us through the window. And my body is burning all over. Now it's healed, but then I was badly burnt. At first the first grenade hit Mikita in the head. The pillows lay there and he was thrown up into the air like this, legs up. And I ... see, I was wounded by a splinter here. I saw what had happened to the others, who was killed, wounded, who was nearly burnt already... Lord! I dragged the table to the window, pulled him up onto the table, my husband, and then crawled out myself through the window. It's not that I thought, my dears, I didn't think I was going to live, I thought that if I got him outside they'd finish us off sooner. I was all on fire, see, all burned and wounded... And we fell down there near the window. And just then when I was dragging him out they were driving out our cattle. They set fire to the shed, but didn't kill the cattle, drove it all out. They untethered the cattle and were walking off; they saw the old woman lying there dead, and us lying there, everything on us was burnt...

"One other woman jumped out, my husband's sister, who was wounded; she jumped out in a fever, and died in front of the window.

"And I lie there and don't feel anything, I lost consciousness even. For some time I was completely out. It started in our village at ten o'clock, and they came into our house at one, and it was already sunset when I came to. I realized I was alive, got up, moved, saw that he, too, was alive, and that our neighbour, when she ran away, had thrown out a bundle. And all my clothes had burnt up, everything had burnt...

"One girl was left in the house, and when the

eaves burnt, when it tumbled down, I could just hear her moaning ee-ee-ee! in there. She'd give a wheeze. And again ... wheeze... She was long dying. Because she wasn't wounded. The Lord knows, she gurgled for a long time. The whole house had already burnt down and she was still gurgling...

"Well, I got up, looked around, my neighbour's house was two steps away. I took that bundle of hers and untied it. Well, we were naked, you know. And I felt that I was wounded here, that my flesh had been torn away here. I untied that bundle, found him some pants, made a string out of the suspenders and tied them up, found a towel and bandaged him up. And the grenade had hit him right here beneath the knees: it tore up his veins and everything there, there was no way he could get up. So I placed him on one arm like so and on the other and dragged him like that. I dragged him three kilometres in my arms. I'd drag him a ways, stop a bit, and then I just lost my strength, I couldn't drag him any more. And I had this feeling, you know, this feeling!... I felt they were going to come... I laid him in some bushes, broke some branches for him, took off my clothing, tore the blanket in two, put half over my head and covered him with the other half. And then I again tore in half that half of the blanket that was on me, spread it out for him, laid him on it and set off.

"Well, I thought, 'there's a couple of kilometres left to the partisan detachment, I'll drag myself there and there they'll give me help.'

"The commander of the detachment was called Mikhailovsky...

"They gave me a sleigh, harnessed a horse. And Mikhailovsky ordered me: 'Get in. And if they start coming this way, the Germans, don't you take off with the horse; leave the horse and run into the forest so they don't catch you.'

"I asked them to give me someone: I had to pass near Khvoinya, you see.

"We went and got my man... They immediately gave a mattress from on top of the hot stove for him, and felt boots. I myself was all but naked, all torn up, blood was running...

"We laid him in the sleigh... Well, I unrolled that mattress, laid him in the sleigh and brought him there, where the detachment was.

"He was a real man, thanks to him!...

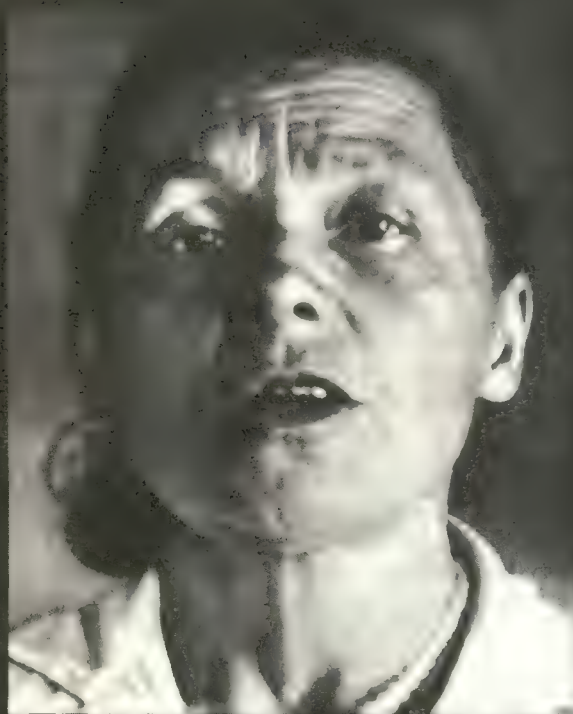
"My husband was helpless. Those who didn't see him thought he had helped me at least some. He would regain his senses, come to, well, when they laid him on the stove some kind of seeds were lying there. Poor soul, those seeds just swam. His blood oozed out to the last ounce, all his veins were torn. And he kept begging us. Would say a couple of words... He kept passing out all the time. He'd come to and say: 'Save me, lads, I'll be a brother to you!...'

"So then. The next day the partisan detachment reported that the Germans were advancing on that village. Where was I to go? They sent me off, the partisans gave me a cart... They didn't give me one to be exact, but just ordered people to take me to Kurin. There there was also a detachment, and Lapteika, a doctor. So that he'd dress my husband's wounds, give him help. They drove me there and he looked at him and said: 'My dear girl, he won't live. There is not one ounce of blood left in him...' That's one thing. Then he said: 'He will live three more days like that: his heart is still strong, unhurt, but he's lost all that blood. He needs a blood transfusion. Otherwise, he's finished.'

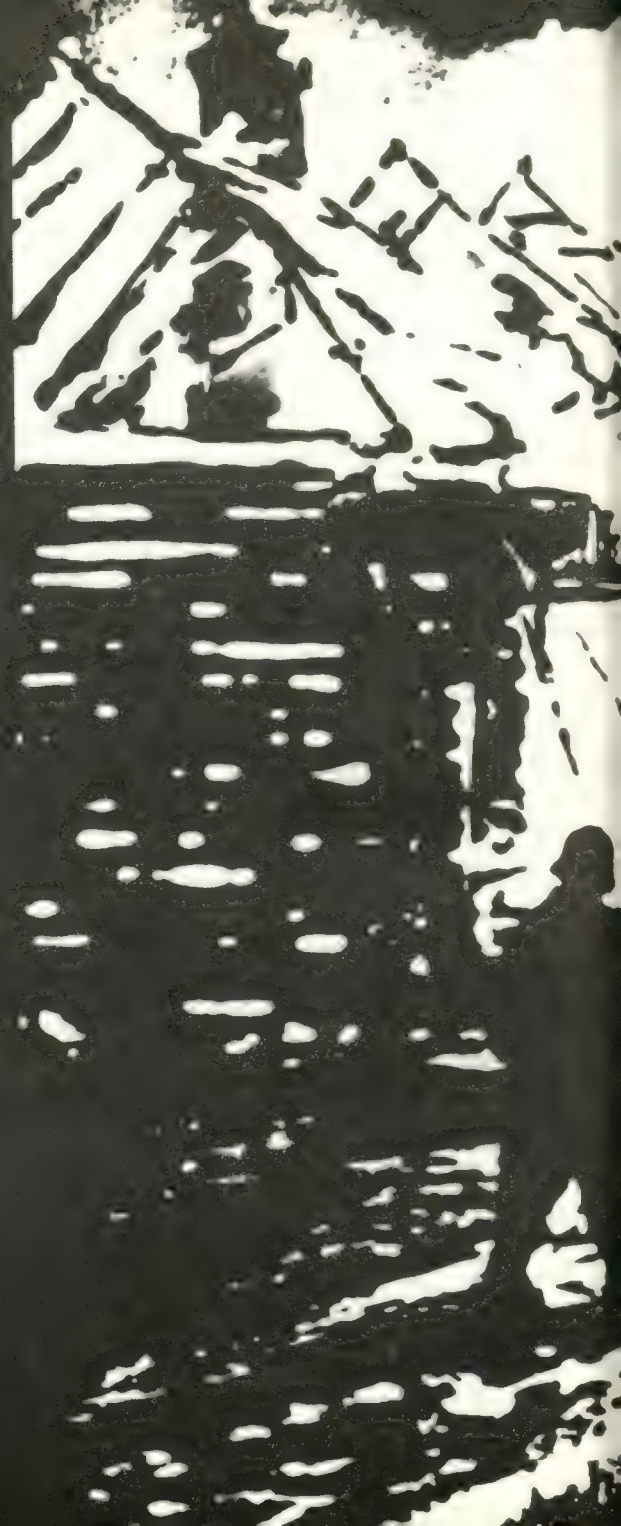
"Well, he said: 'You'll go through your share of suffering yet. Well, you may as well suffer three more days with him...'

"While this was going on, after just five minutes they reported that the Germans were in

"...I went into the woods. I walked along—where, I didn't know... And I had no strength left. I was pregnant, two months before my term. And so badly burnt... I am pulling him on the sled and he's tossing and turning, poor soul, raving, speaking deliriously..."



Volga Minich





Dolgiye Nivy and that we had to leave Kurin.

"By the time I came out everyone down to the last man had run off into the woods. Well, the Germans were advancing, and I was the only person left in the house. The doctor had trimmed off the flesh on him, dressed his wounds, bandaged him up. I didn't know what to do, didn't know where to run now. And I just howled and howled... I says: 'Lord, better had I died there in my own village.' I don't know what in the world to do. I sit there.

"Thank God, God sent some men from Khvoynya. Rygor Rometsky, Vladimir Mikhal'kov... Many, many men were coming. They recognized me and immediately helped me out. They ran from yard to yard and found me a sled. They put that mattress of mine on it, laid him on it and pulled him to Gleboviye Polyany. They expected the Germans in Kurin, and so they took me farther off thataway. They took me to Gleboviye Polyany, there were people there, but all on the alert. They were all moving into the woods. I spent the night there, and people advised me: 'Go to Vezhin, there are only forty households there in the midst of the forest. There the Germans might not even find you.'

"I got to Vezhin. Everyone was already in the street. They had already heard that the Germans had burnt down Khvoynya and killed and burnt people in Kurin.

"Go across the field,' they told me, 'and there you will find the village of Grabniki. Go to that village, it's also a village in the woods...'

"I had just left Vezhin, but hadn't yet reached Grabniki, when shooting started in Vezhin... Later people from Vezhin, those that were left alive, told how they had driven all the people out into the street, counted them and drawn them up in lines. And every second or third person they put, one here, the other there, one here, the other

there. They made two lines. One line they drove into a house and set it on fire, and the other stood in the middle of the street. Korzhichikha ... she had a little boy and girl. The little girl was left with her and the little boy was sent into the house: he was put in the other line. Cattle was left from the villages where they had burnt people. They left forty people, people from Vezhin, to drive the cattle.

"Well, I reached Grabniki. In Grabniki there was also not one person indoors. I walked through the whole village pulling the sled. There was nowhere I could stop. Only one woman. She had come and baked some biscuits, poor thing, for her children in the woods. And she says to me: 'It's already the third day since we've moved out. When they burnt Kurin, we left the village. We all live there in the forest.'

"And I had an aunt, my mother's sister, in Oktyabrsky. I thought: 'Well, Oktyabrsky is still standing.' The partisans had said that the Germans were in Rabkor at the station. But they hadn't yet been in Oktyabrsky. I'll go there, I thought, and it was already the third day ... the second, actually, and I had not yet eaten or drunk anything... I went from Grabniki to Oktyabrsky.

"I arrive in Oktyabrsky, this is in winter, at three o'clock. In two hours it will already be dark. As soon as my aunt saw I was burnt and wounded and had a look at my husband, she said: 'Oh Lord, what did you bring him to me for? You brought him to me to destroy my family. The Germans will see you and say we're hiding partisans...'

"It's getting dark... Really and truly, hope to die!... It's getting dark and she says: 'Go away!...'

QUESTION: "She was your aunt?"

"My own aunt, my mother's sister. That's how scared people were!...

"I says to her: 'Auntie, give me a knitted shawl, I only have a kerchief made out of a blanket that I tore in two, it's cold. I'll get somewhere,' I says.

"'And where will you get to? 'The Germans will finish you off at once. Where will you get to with that wounded man? You go into the woods now, otherwise you'll ruin people because of him...'

"So I went into the woods. I walked along — where, I didn't know. I was sick and tired of it all. I thought: 'If only this comes to an end somehow!...' And I had no strength left. I was pregnant, two months before my term. And so badly burnt... I walked and walked with the sled... Oh yes, I had been warned in Oktyabrsky not to go through Rabkor. 'Go through the woods,' they said, 'roundabout, there is a barrack there in the woods, railwaymen live there, workers. Five families, go spend the night there...' The Germans were in Rabkor. That was at a distance of ... three kilometres from the barrack, maybe less. I'm pulling him on the sled and he's tossing and turning, poor soul, raving, speaking deliriously. I reached the barracks, go in — a woman is standing on the porch.

"'My dear sweet woman,' she says, 'don't stop by here, because they've already taken our men away in carts. Yesterday,' she says, 'the Germans took our men and carts and said: "If someone shows up here... The snow is unbroken and if there is a path, that will mean," they said, "that partisans were here. And that you're feeding them. Beware lest there be a single trace!" And that woman also said: "They, the Germans, only just left, they went to set an ambush. We have some really dark woods here between Dyomenki and Rabkor... Well,' she said, 'here's some matches for you, go that way. There's a barn there and there you can make a fire. Don't make it in the open,' she says, 'because the Germans went that way to set an ambush in Tyomnoye.'

"Well, I took those matches and walked and walked... Lord was I worn out! They wouldn't let me stop for a rest anywhere... The snow was deep then, very deep, and firm on top, with a thin crust of ice. A spruce tree was standing there. I went down that way — there was no snow under the spruce, they're dry underneath, the branches, I broke off some twigs and made a fire. And sat there. Whatever was in store for me — thank God for that. *I wasn't afraid of death, not in the least. I thought they were killing everyone right and left, all over the earth. I wasn't even scared anymore...*"

"I thought they were killing everyone right and left", "I wasn't afraid of death anymore" — note these words. Similar ones will more than once appear in many people's accounts, and they explain a lot. A person who sees *such things* begins to think that they are already the norm everywhere, "all over the world"...

"...I sat there waiting and even dozed off a bit.

"And I made the fire at his feet. He was cold all over... He was alive, you know, but like a log to lift. All because he'd lost that blood probably. He was stiff all over, when you had to bend him, he was like wooden..."

"Well so I'm sitting there and then I hear a rustle. I look and see someone coming toward me in a white sheet with a rifle. He came up like that quite close, but he doesn't come right up to the fire. He asks: 'Who are you?'

"Well, I realized he was talking Russian, but I didn't answer a word: I just lost my tongue. He saw that I wanted to get up but couldn't. He came up and said: 'Lady, there's a barn right nearby.'

"There were partisans in that barn. He came up to me, that partisan, and took my sled. He said

that the barn was right nearby, that we'd be together. He helped me there, they gave me a little bowl, I melted some snow in it and drank a bit. I didn't eat anything at all, my throat was all dried up, see. 'Well,' I thought, 'thank God I got to some people at last.'

"Well, at this point their commander gave the order to get ready. And I wanted to fasten the sled on to their wagon. But the commander didn't let me, he said: 'You can't. We're going on reconnaissance, to find out where there's a good place to spend the day, and then we'll come back, warm up and set off together. But you can't come with us now, have a rest.'

"And I thought: 'I'm so exhausted... If they'll come back, what do I care? I'll rest up in the meantime.'

"He says: 'Don't douse the fire, let the fire burn.'

"It was a big, big fire!... Those partisans left, and I, my dears, took such a fright!... They hadn't gone thirty metres before I began to throw those brands out of the barn. I kept throwing them out... Smoke rose up from the brands. I trampled out all that fire. I carried over snow in the bowl, stamped out the fire, and sat down in the corner on the sled next to him and sat there as bold as you please, I wasn't scared anymore. I sat like that for an hour maybe. As a matter of fact it was soon daylight. I hear people speaking... I think: 'There now, I scattered that fire, put it out all for nothing. My friends are already coming.'

"They're coming on horseback and skis. Germans!... And they kick those brands around. Smoke is coming up from them. Word of honour, hope to die!... They kick those brands around, ger-gering away. They look where the tracks lead, and set out on that trail, hot on their tracks — after the partisans!...

"Lord, Oktyabrsky was already burning!...

When I left Oktyabrsky, that very minute the Germans entered it!..."

Volga Minich dragged her sled on further, and we will meet her again later in other villages, in another forest...

In the meantime we will stop for **Teklya Yakovlevna Kruglova's** account in the township of Oktyabrsky, and then move on to another round of agony in the neighbouring village of Rudnya, because they tried to kill this woman *twice in the same day*, but she was left alive, one of a thousand... Today she is sixty five.

"...I had some wounded men in my house. Partisans. Well, a guard was standing there near us... Ah, yes, a plane flew in, to Bunyov, and picked up those wounded men. The partisans said to me: 'Mind you, the detachment is getting out of here, and you'd better follow after the detachment, too, otherwise they'll tear you to pieces as soon as those Germans come.'

"Well, this is what I thought: 'How can I go after them, where will I go?' Here they've surrounded us all around, they say, encircled us... Well, I didn't go with them and stayed at home.

"I didn't live here then, I lived opposite the factory. So I ran out to that factory and crawled into the smoke stack. Well, I crawled in and see our men sitting there, in that pipe, four of them. There was even a partisan, and three others. My husband was at the front, and I didn't have any children — so I was alone. I made for that smoke stack. I sat there for a while and, you know, my neighbour comes. He was called Grib. He comes and says: 'Crawl out of there,' he says, 'the Germans are throwing around handbills and they'll give us, you know, tea and bread. Crawl out of

there, they're so nice, they say they give people smokes. Come out of there.'

"Those men went and crawled out. They left, and they were picked up there and driven into the club..."

"I sat and sat in that smoke stack, and then I thought, I'll get over to my shed. Our workers' sheds were all in a row behind the factory. When I got to that shed the Germans were already there, they had driven the cattle there. There was a whole herd between those sheds. Ah yes, so I thought: 'I'll go and stand near those cows they drove here.' Four men are already standing there, looking after those cows. And I think: 'I'll also herd those cows. So that at least they won't kill me, so that they won't recognize me as the mistress of that house.' Because they had asked lots of people and asked me, too: 'Did you see the mistress of that house?'"

"That was when I was running to hide in the factory. And I said: 'She's already gone, that woman, she's not here anymore.'"

"And here I'm going over there myself. Because it was frightening in that pipe. The Germans will come, they'll throw some kind of bomb and blow up the factory — and that will be the end of me, I thought. If I have to die somewhere, at least let it be more in the open, because in that iron..."

"I went into my shed — there was a German there! I had just entered the shed, put my leg on a log to climb to the top and hide from them, when the German came toward me! So I went after my cow, drove her out and stood next to the herd. I thought he wouldn't recognize me and I'd herd those cows, too. They were driving them into Glusk. But the Germans came up, grabbed me and drove me in front of them."

"I wondered where they could be driving me. We came to the club and they shoved me in there."

Well, in the club we just sat there and sat there..."

QUESTION: "How many of you were there in that club?"

"A hundred and ninety. The men counted."

"And I went and said: 'Women, the Germans will kill us here.'"

"'Oh, no they won't...'"

"And that same Grib that had called us out of the pipe was already locked up in there, too. And I says: 'And Grib here even came, he did, and summoned his son and called for us to come out of there, too.'"

"And he says: 'Don't be afraid, your husband's at the front. They said that those who had people at the front, those they wouldn't shoot. Only partisan families. There will be a meeting.'"

"Well, we wait for that meeting, for when it will take place... It's five o'clock already and there still hasn't been any meeting. The Germans are all lying on the slopes of the railway embankment. And they have tommy-guns trained at the club. And we keep looking, looking out the window, and they're lying there. With skulls... They have something white here and some kind of stripes over there. And these little bottles at their sides, yellow, like half-pint bottles they were. They hurl those bottles at the club — woosh! Our club shot up in flames! There was no meeting at all! They set fire to us from the outside. They went and sprayed that club — and the club started to burn. And then one of us, he worked in the office as a book-keeper, he went and hurled himself at the window, the sash, and flew out with his son. His son was of a height with him. And also a woman. Five of us jumped out. As they flew out that window one after the other, well, the Germans — those that were lying by the railroad — let fly at them. They all ran, like a string of geese or something, one after the other, and so they all fell, those people. And I was behind, let myself fall out

the window, and there was a ditch there, and some bushes. And there was water under the window, and snow on top. So when I flew out, I fell into that ditch. And I lay there in that ditch. If the wind had blown that fire in my direction, I would have burnt up in the ditch all the same. But the wind was in the other direction, toward the storehouses, and the storehouses also burnt. That's how I was left alive.

"And then — I lay and lay, and those people are screeching and howling and the dogs are barking... They were burning to death, see... Oh, in different voices, it was unbearable!... There I've started to shake all over again!... The people were screaming in different voices. That was inside the club..."

People who escaped the fire most often describe the worst moments in one or two phrases: "They were screeching, barking... howling..." Everything merged into one: human screams, the crackle of the fire, the barking of the Alsatians...

Or else, suddenly, speaking of the same thing, they come up with things like: "Those people, how they cried! In all kinds of voices, like bees." (**Maria Grigoryevna Kulak**, Boroviki, Grodno Region.)

Or else the narrator just falls silent. At this point you're not going to ask him to repeat, question him. There's just a long pause, like a spasm, filled with the eyes and face of a person who has been dealt fresh burns by his memory, and who begs your pardon to boot: "There I just started to shake all over again!..."

"...I lay there and lay there and thought... I'll go to Rudnya, there I have friends, maybe someone will hide me. Maybe some people are left alive there..."

"I got up. If only a cat somewhere, or some sparrow, or something in the whole wide world — nothing... It's so silent... But maybe I'm the only person left in the world?..."

"And I think, let those Germans shoot me or something... Because how will I live alone in the world?"

Such awful things are happening that a person no longer believes that it is only here they're taking place: maybe it's like this everywhere, all over the world! Wherever he turns, it's all the same, everywhere there are walls of fire, of death...

"...And then I think: 'I'll go to Rudnya.' There are no Germans, nobody. They've already all left here, left Oktyabrsky — burnt it and left.

"I walk there across the fields, I'm all wet, my scarf was left in the club, and so were the galoshes for my felt boots, and these were homemade felt boots, and they got soft in the water and stretched... Steam is coming up from me ... like smoke. And I think, maybe I'm burning, maybe, you know, this fire-brand from the club fell on me. I look here, and all over — nope, there isn't anything!

"I came there without a scarf. I had just got there, reached some little shed, and there was a small house there on the edge of the village. And I'm standing there and hear — screaming... Such screaming there, dear God, such screaming! They had taken them from the other end of the village, from over there, and were driving them toward this end, in the direction of the state farm. They were driving those people along, all the women. And planes began to fire at the ground..."

"I'm standing next to that cattle-shed and thinking I'll have a look at what they're doing there, that they're screaming so. I'd just stuck my head round the corner when a German happened

to look my way the very moment I looked. He flies toward me shouting. A-a-a! How he hit me with his butt! He cut open my cheek, and my whole lip, and my teeth went one on top of the other. My mouth was full of blood. I took that blood and raked it out with my hands, so I could at least breathe!...

"And they drove me into the collective-farm office. These Rudnya people are also saying, like they did in our village, that the Germans will choose: those who are partisans they'll shoot and the others they'll release.

"And I says: 'My dear girls, they already did a meeting with us, and not one person,' I says, 'is left. Everyone,' I says, 'is already burnt, people are dying there now. Some,' I says, 'are still shrieking their last, so,' I says, 'don't worry — everyone will have one and the same fate.'

"Well, they kept us there for a long time, too... They started with the men, those who were in another building. The Germans ask one policeman: 'Where do you have a man who can speak German?'

"They call out that man's first and last name. The man came up, said something in German to the German and then grabbed him under the armpits like this and put him on all fours. That German. He was an old man, but sturdy, you know. And they begin to shout: 'A-la-la-la!' There were only three of them Germans near our house, near the office. Sentries that watched us through the windows. Oh, those Germans just flew out of our house, took that old man and killed him.

"Let's have another one that can speak German.'

"They called up another man. That one had also been in Germany, during the old war. He spoke and spoke and they — bam! — put a bullet in his forehead.

"That's when the men tried to break away through the door!... If they'd made their break when he put that German on all fours and had grabbed those rifles! If they'd known!... Well the men made a break, and five of them got out and were left alive. They tore off across the fields.

"Well, they killed the men, and then they ordered the carters — we all heard: 'Take off their coats, new felt boots and new galoshes and hats.'

"And they took the hats off the men who had been killed, and their coats, three wagons full.

"And then it was our turn... They put, brought a box and put a machine-gun on the box. The kind of case potatoes are shipped in. A German comes and shoves out a few people, I mean, three, four, five — however many he can shove out. Who wants to go to be shot anyway? Well, a mother, you know, grabs her dear ones, clasps her family and falls. They'd shout: 'Fall!', you see. A mother and her children, or relatives of some kind — they embrace and fall. And they fire at them from the machine-gun...

"I kept standing in the back, didn't go out, uh-uh.

"So they're all looking out the window, saying: 'My daughter is burning over there, and my grandsons are burning...'

"And just think, they didn't even cry or anything!...

"So they're shooting like that over here, and over there was the collective farm's firehouse. They locked the women up separately to burn them, and the men separately. The lads that were older they put in with the men, and the little ones, they were with us. There were also people from Bobruisk in there with us. They had run here for safety, where the partisans were living. Well, that's why they all came here.

"There were only seven of us left now — they had shoved all the others out. There were big

**Teklya Kruglova
Ganna Paduta
Ganna Goshka with her daughter and
mother—Matruna Budnik**





chinks in the floor. I, you know, went up and stuck my hands in the chinks and lifted out that floorboard in a trice.

"‘This way, women,’ I says. And I’m already in the hole. Those women all ran into the hole.

"The German came for us, for the rest of us, but we had taken cover. In that hole. He came for the rest and there was not one soul left. The children were in the hole, too ... dear God, how they all screamed in there! That German opened the hole and began to hit people with his butt: ‘Climb out!’

"They don’t want to. Who wants to crawl out to be hit by bullets? He yells: ‘Climb out!’

"They don’t want to, uh-uh. He starts to hit their heads with that butt of his. And then they began to climb out. Those that couldn’t go outside, those they just shot right there, over that hole, those women.

"And I and one other woman there — she was from Rudnya and is still alive today, she is. She had a little girl, still very small, eighteen months old. And we went and crawled farther over there, under the beam. I was all bloody, in the sand, with our faces in the sand so we wouldn’t cough... So we’re lying there, we can hear, the hole is open

and they’ve already stuck their heads in, looked to see if maybe someone else is left. They couldn’t see, it was dark. Only the moon shone, I remember that well. So they looked and then said to those carters: ‘Get some straw and make a fire.’

"Those carters, they obeyed, you know, out of fear — they put some straw in this building and in another. Then they were ordered: ‘Tear out the window-frames!’

"They tore them out, threw the tables and doors on top of the straw.

"‘Light it!’

"So they lit it.

"‘Vyarchytse vyarche!’ *

"They made the twists.

"‘Light them and throw them into the hole!’

"He thinks maybe there’re people in there, this way at least they’ll suffocate in there. The straw on those twists began to smoulder, but the smoke didn’t reach us. It all went out of the hole into the hut. So they lit that fire...

"We sit there, sit there all night, and they light everything up with rockets — we can see down there in our hole, it’s like broad daylight you can

* Make twists of straw.

see so well. What are we poor things to do? Dear God!... They set the place on fire — and we heard the eaves fall down. But those weren't our eaves, they were the firehouse's, and our fire just went out..."

Nearby in the firehouse the same thing was happening... In that firehouse and in two other houses in Rudnya, and in dozens and, later, hundreds of villages in Byelorussia... It is horrifying to multiply such figures, because each of them represents a man and his family, his mother, his children, brothers, sisters, because each of them represents immense human terror and pain. There are hundreds and thousands of them, of those who will never tell now, on whose behalf these people tell, and there are very few of the latter indeed. And each of the thousands who perished experienced *this*, this and perhaps something even more horrible, and those who survived cannot share even a particle of that agony...

The firehouse was not far from the collective-farm office where Teklya Kruglova hid under the floor, and this is what happened there, in the words of **Ganna Iosifovna Goshka**, now past fifty, who was there during those awful hours and minutes; she now lives in the new, rebuilt Rudnya.

"...We were drawn up in lines in the collective-farm yard. The men separately. Then they drove the men away from us entirely, drove them into the stables. And they packed us into the firehouse, jammed full. You couldn't have stuck a finger in there. They drove us in and set a German on guard over us. Then they drive those men, taking ten at a time and herding them to another shed. Herd them from one shed into another... A German is sitting there. And they set up a machine-gun on the benches — right there in the door-

way... So we're sitting in that there... There was no room to sit there, there was no way you could sit, we were all suffocating in there. I was in the very doorway. And with me was my little sister. I held her in my arms. They squeezed us in so tight...

"I saw it all, how they drove those men. The men see that they're shooting them, and directly they come out they start running away. We had a cripple, he was lame, and a German, you know, hits him and hits him!... Some they chased back, and some ran through the field, ran away.

"Then the women asked that German: 'Sir, what is it they — are they going to shoot us?'

"Well, at first he waved his hand. Some German, the devil take him... And then he goes: 'No, mother, no, no, no!...'

"He probably guessed that people would run away or — the devil only knows...

"And those women are wailing and shrieking. When they had killed those men they began to pour something there at the corners. And then suddenly the shed caught fire. Then they all come over here to us. And there were policemen there with them, too. We had one of them, from Smykovich he was, the devil take him... And one woman asks him: 'Andrei, dear, what is it they're going to do to us?'

"'They're not going to do anything to you!' That's what that policeman said. True, he took out his mother, and the other one, the other policeman, did, too. They got theirs out of the shed and led them away.

"And they led us, six girls and one woman who was our village deputy, into an empty house. And three of them Germans came with us. Two, and the third brought up the rear. Well, we walk over there... I'll go and tell everything... People had said that they outraged girls. Well, we walked bent over so as not to seem so young... And he

motions to that woman, the deputy to sit down. But she doesn't want to sit down. She runs here and there, that woman. And all the rest jumped up, oh God, and bade farewell to their friends and relatives! And that woman was hit in the back of the head and died immediately. I went and immediately fell to the floor. They finished shooting us and went back. They drove in some others.

"The third time round I heard my little sister coming. She's crying so, because she can see me — I'm still on top. She fell right here, at my feet... They killed her in the third group..."

"Then I just lay and waited, I don't know what for... And they packed so many dead people in there! And then — crash! — they broke in the windows — and began to machine-gun us in there. Well, all the same I wasn't hit anywhere, only my arm was burnt here and my sleeve got singed. And people are groaning so! And I think, what should I do — should I crawl out?"

"I thought the whole world already — that there was no one anywhere in the world. And you could see Oktyabrsky burning. And I thought that everything was finished..."

Again the same thought appears that took hold of Volga Minich and Teklya Kruglova. When everything around you is burning and such things are being done to people ... you get the idea, the feeling, that these things have perhaps started or are going on all over the world. Because they are at odds with normal, human reason. Without knowing about the "plan" which really had been secretly drawn up for the whole world, people nevertheless divined its savage scope. Around and about her a fearful slaughter machine had begun to operate, and a simple woman from Polesye suddenly sensed a threat to the whole world, to all good people, assessed her inordinate grief and calamity in universal terms. Because she, on

behalf of the whole world, of all its people, had seen with her own eyes what nazism was and how it had actually begun to realize its ultimate goals...

"I saw that it was dark, only a sliver of moon was rising, it had just begun to rise. Then, well there was an old woman in there with us (she died the year before last, I think), and she starts to wail: 'Ah, my darling daughter, why did they kill you, better had they killed me!...'"

"She was keening her daughter. And then I, you know, called out. And she says to me: 'My child, is that you? Are you really unhurt?'"

"And I don't know, I can't feel my legs: there are so many people on top of me. All I know is that my head is whole. Well, you know, that woman, thanks to her, helped me crawl out."

"And with us there in that house was a little lad. They had killed his father in that shed where the men were, and him they had dressed up as a girl, because people had said that they killed boys. And he, poor thing, was badly wounded: here, his stomach and everything, was all torn up... And he, poor thing, begs us: 'Pull me out so I won't burn.'"

"Everything is already burning in there. And he begs us... We, of course, grabbed him up and dropped him out the window. And we ourselves crawled out the window. With that woman there. And what do you know — they began to shoot at us, but we just hid behind the smoke and kept on going. And in those days there were sheds and barns, old ones. The old woman says: 'Let's run into the woods.'"

"And I say: 'Oh no, let's go over there, to your sister-in-law.'"

"She lived over there on the other side of the stream. But the old woman keeps wanting to run into the woods. We're sitting behind this barn, and I say: 'I'm not going anywhere, I'll stay here.'"

"And then we see people running with children on their shoulders — already from the other village. They're running into the woods. Then we went, too..."

Oktyabrsky burnt down, over eight hundred people were burnt in Rudnya, and Volga Minich and hundreds of others like her who ran from village to village, from tree to tree, now also saw the sky blaze up around Smuga, around Kovali, around Lavstyki...

"...The cows are bellowing," Minich continues her story, "the cattle that was left around, and the dogs are barking."

Here is what was happening at the time in Kurin, where she first ran for safety after Khvoinya:

"...When the Germans were in Khvoinya we were told that they were burning people," recounts **Matruna Trofimovna Grinkevich** from the village of Kurin. "We all went into the forest: our mothers and fathers, too. And then we stayed in the forest until evening. Well, what of it, it's quiet, no one is coming or driving our way. We go into the village, there were three of us girls — not one of them is alive, only I was left. We're walking — and we were, you know, sixteen maybe — we were walking along and stopped to look at ourselves in a mirror on the hill, and the Germans were already feeding their horses. We were carrying it with us. We'd taken it from the woods and were carrying it with us. Girls, you know! And the mirror was a big one — we looked at ourselves in it. The carters later said that the Germans saw how we stopped on the hill and looked at ourselves. Well, so we reached the village, and my mother was home. She says: 'Run away, daughter, because they take the young people off in carts. Get going,' she says, 'toward

Smuga. Not into the woods, but to Smuga.'

"Well, so I went. My father was there. We spent the night there. Well, we got up, everyone is looking around. They say: 'They aren't touching those who stayed at home in Kurin.'

"Well, so I said: 'Pa, I'm going home because mother has a lot of work. So I'll help her some there.'

"We set off, six of us went. We come up, we had storehouses there not far from the village. Nine Germans are already standing there, sentries. They let us into the village. *As we walk we can see that there's not one person left anywhere in the world except for Germans, no one.* A woman was walking along (they burnt her afterwards, but her son, an invalid, is still alive today), and they even took her galoshes from her, probably they grudged her those galoshes on her feet. Well they lead us to our apartment. We get there, and there isn't anybody, no one. I walked into the house and see that mother had been in the house. Only her apron is hanging on the rack.

"'They must have stuck those people somewhere,' I says, 'because there isn't anyone.'

"And then they brought five men in, our men from Kurin. My uncle. We ask: 'Uncle, wherever are our mothers?!'

"He says: 'They'll be coming soon.'

"He knew everything, but he didn't tell us. Well, the Germans beat one old man there very badly. They beat him and beat him, and he was from Khvoinya himself. Such a little old man, with his granddaughter, too. And they put him in the corner, like a little child. That old man.

"And then a Czech* came up and said: 'Girls, they'll kill you and burn you. It's an order they've issued,' he says. 'I wouldn't kill you...'

* In the spring of 1942 there were Slovak troops in Oktyabrsky District. But the Germans soon removed them when they saw that the Slovaks went over to the partisans' side.

“That’s what the sentry says to us. And we started crying. He up and left. Just went into the village. Well, so I says: ‘You know what: let’s run away. Better have them kill us on the run than for us to see all this.’

“And they, when they started burning people – they took them out over there, beyond the hill, where that monument stands there – they closed our shutters, in that apartment of ours, so we wouldn’t see. And then when those people began to burn, he came and said: ‘Go and look at the people burning.’

“We looked ... and started to cry. I says: ‘Why should we have to see this again when they burn us alive and kill us and have their fun with us. Let them kill us in flight.’

“Well, we began to run away... And six of us ran away. Only my uncle, who told us that our mothers would come – he couldn’t run away... We started to run away, started to run away, two people ran into the graveyard and they wounded the man and killed the girl in the graveyard and dragged her into the fire with a rope. And me and this girl here (*she indicates her middle-aged friend and neighbour Lyubov Mordus*) ran away the two of us together. Well, where did we run to? In those years there were many barns – it’s now I only have one barn, but my father had four, and a shed and a storeroom and two houses – that’s how dense it was with buildings. Well, as soon as we popped out they began to shoot at us!... There was a machine-gun on the house. The bullets just flew – but they flew away into the distance, right close up they didn’t hit. We scurried around there, in that yard, and shot behind a shed, and sat down there. Here was a shed, and there was another, and ours was next to it. And over there was a great big heap of manure. The Germans looked and prodded around in the hay with pitchforks. They knew they hadn’t got all of us. And

we, as luck would have it, had settled down behind the shed. We ran away at lunchtime and sat there until night. Sat there, and all the same there was no way we could run away at night. The moonlight was real bright and sentries were standing near the graveyard – every three steps there was a sentry. We came out like this and peeked out from behind the fence: well, there was no way we could run away! And also because we didn’t have any experience yet either. If it were now, maybe we would have hidden behind some other shed or have gone on further. But we stay sitting there. And I, out of fright maybe, slept the whole night through. She’d wake me up, say: ‘Motya, don’t sleep.’

“And I’d say: ‘I wouldn’t.’

“And as soon as I’d said it I’d be asleep again. Out of fright probably. Ah yes, in the evening still (how could I forget!) – in the evening, when it got dark, they brought out those people that were in the house, men, six of them, to shoot them. Well, and they shot them. They’d fire a shot, well, and we’re sitting there, I only covered my eyes with my hands like this. A bullet might fly our way, see: they’re shooting them in the shed that we’re sitting behind.

“And then they brought a child, maybe two years old. That was left in our house. Just like our little fellow here... Well, that child, they didn’t even shoot him. What they did to him, I can’t tell you. He just gave a child’s cry... But there wasn’t any shot. He was burnt up in that shed of ours. Those men, too.

“We sat there until morning. And it was already getting light, and they began to leave, and ordered the carters to catch the hens. And this hen just ran, sat down right between us. And it sits there. And we’re sitting there. Well, we pretended to be dead, we were more dead than alive anyway as they came toward us. No, they were carters, but

we didn't explain to them that we were alive. One of us sat like so, leaning to one side, and the other, to the other. They took that hen, well, and went away. They went away and then he brings someone else. He brings someone else, so I says to her: 'Lyuba, this will be our death now, for sure, he's bringing Germans this time.'

"They come up, stand there for a while and say to each other: 'Look,' he says, 'how those poor people are lying there! Wherever you look there are some lying.'

"Well, just the same we didn't call out. We just lay there like that, well, we didn't explain to them.

"Well, the Germans began to drive away. And when they'd get up to here, to the graveyard, they'd speak out and clap their hands. They were ever so glad they'd burnt up the partisans. And then some others drive up, the first ones drive away, and these others drive up and each time it's the same; they speak and clap their hands like this. They continued leaving until lunchtime. That's how many there were of them.

"Well, when they had already left, we got up and I fell down maybe three times. Of course, we had sat there all night, and our legs had got numb because of that probably, and so I fell down three times before I got away from that place. We got up and left. We went stealthily back to Smuga, where we had been. We didn't know where to go. Well, so we went there. And they drove around and didn't pick us up, although they saw us walking. You see, they thought: 'Go ahead, you'll get caught again. In that same fire.' And so we just went.

"We get to Smuga, my father was there. Well, they all question us and we told them they had already burnt the people, told them all to run away. Well, nobody could: they were burning everywhere... They set fire to Kovali. At that very moment. And these men crawl up onto the

"And then they brought a child, maybe two years old... Just like our little fellow here... Well, that child, they didn't even shoot him... He just gave a child's cry... He was burnt up in that shed of ours."

Matruna Grinkevich



roof, look and see them catching children and throwing them into the fire... Well, we spent one more night there with Lyuba, that same Lyuba... Now she is a woman, but then we were girls. And my father was with us. Well, we spent the night... Then in the morning we got up and I says: 'You know what, pa... I'm going back to look where mother was burnt.'

"He says: 'Don't go, you went yesterday and got into such horrible trouble.'

"'No,' I says, 'I'm going. I'm going, I won't stay here...'

"Something in my soul feels I don't want to be there. Well, so he says: 'I'll go, too.'

"'Don't go, Daddy, you're weak and won't be able to run away, but I'll get away in any case.'

"I'd lived through the whole war and felt in my heart that I'd get away from the Germans. Well, so I went. I says to that girl, to Lyuba: 'Let's go again together, maybe we'll be left alive and maybe they'll kill us, but all the same let's go again.'

"We're just entering Kurin, the big village — both her father and mine lived there on the outskirts — fifteen minutes hadn't passed before those Germans surrounded Smuga again and burnt it down in a moment.

"Some partisans were coming. We stopped in our tracks: at first we thought they were Germans, then we looked closer and saw they were partisans coming. This miller Parfim, he's still alive now, works as a forester. He runs up to us and asks how and what, and how we ran away. He climbed up a ladder there, had a look and said: 'Girls, don't go there: Smuga is burning with its people, go to such and such a place in the woods. Go,' he says, 'follow that man over there, he'll lead you to where our families are.'

"She and I had just run up hill when we saw my father running out of the woods, out of Smuga. So we ran along together..."

Khvoynya, Kurin, Smuga, Oktyabrsky, Kovali... In Kovali they took people in groups of twos and threes from their houses, brought them near a shed and ordered them to strip and lie down — and all in rows, so that their heads lay on the backs of the people who had already been killed... Fire, death and terror spread farther and farther through the countryside...

Some people made for the woods, others, not knowing what was best, where to flee with their children — because the same thing seemed to be going on everywhere, all over the world — stuck to their houses or their neighbours. From time immemorial it had been safer that way. But something which no longer tallied with normal human experience had begun, had descended upon the world...

"...From Kurin they came on to us," recalls **Ganna Sergeyevna Paduta** from the village of Lavstyki. "Well, we were sitting at home, guessing away, and then the partisans told us that they were burning people, that in Kurin they had burnt all the people alive. Well, we ran away into the woods. We stayed there for a while in the woods. And then... Smoke is coming from the stoves, from the chimneys everywhere, in Oktyabrsky, in our village. Well, so we went back again, because it was scary in the woods: they might catch us, and it was cold. We had just got home when the Germans came in, a reconnaissance party. Well, there were some men among us, these elderly ones, and they said: 'Bring out a table with food, this and that. Maybe they'll have mercy on us then.'

"Well, our women, of course, acted like all women do. They brought out a table, but they say: 'Mothers, there's a whole army more coming.'

"That was the reconnaissance party.

"Afterwards they came, hosts and hosts of them, and stationed themselves in our village. Part of them went to Oktyabrsky. And they also stationed themselves in Kovali. It so happened that we were captured in the village with this other woman (she's already dead). This carter let us know what would happen to us here. We're standing in the street next to the table, and some of them don't say anything, but he comes up and says: 'Ladies, please give me some milk.'

"We said: 'Here you are.'

"And he says: 'Oh, my dear sweet ladies,' he says, 'they'll burn you all alive anyway. They'll drive you into the barn...'"

During the war the nazis showed "documentary" films in Germany and other countries, depicting Soviet "partisans", lots of "partisans", on their knees before the German soldiers. They had a very simple way of shooting these films, as we were told by **Alexei Lomaka** in the village of Velikaya Volya, Dyatel District, Grodno Region. * A crowd of villagers was surrounded by machine-guns, forced to kneel, and a movie camera then whirled into action before they were shot...

The nazis had other "documentary films" showing peasants in the east greeting the "German liberating soldiers" with "joy" and offering them the traditional Russian bread and salt of hospitality... Perhaps it was right here in Lavstyki that those documentary film-makers worked... Everything, as you see, was there: both the table in the middle of the street and the "bread and salt". And hordes and hordes of Germans coming to "free" the eastern territories – free them of people.

* See the chapter "More than ten".

"And they're coming, those vermin. They came along shouting: 'Clear that away!'

"The tables, that is. In these white robes with these skulls they were, you know, the Germans.

"Well, we had all run in different directions to our houses or whatever when the carter told us about that. I ran to my neighbour and said: 'What are we going to do?'

"And she says: 'Go. look outside, whether there're any Germans or not.'

"That end of the village was occupied, but ours was still free. So we went to the settlement that is right at the edge of the forest. And then into the little alder thicket. And there we, about fifteen women maybe, lay in that alder thicket. We just fell down and lay there. We didn't see them burn and kill, just heard – they screamed terribly, people screaming. We couldn't hear what one of them was saying there, only: 'A-a-a!' Only that voice going, that voice. And then that was all – everything went quiet..."

QUESTION: "And that carter who told you, where was he from?"

"He was just a peasant. A polizei wouldn't have told. One polizei came to us to get bread and we asked him what the Germans did to people. And he says to us (we had cut him half a loaf): 'Give me the whole loaf!' and didn't say anything. But that other one there – he was just a good soul who told us. So that at least a few, at least someone was left. He said it as he left – he was holding the glass and said it..."

"They were Germans from the front, maybe they would have burnt even more but the partisans pressed them and they left.

"Before the war we had maybe a hundred and twenty homesteads. We had lots of people, and large families, lots of children. They killed them all. Killed them all, all. They said: 'With you even the hens are partisans, not to speak

of the children.' They gave no mercy, those vermin..."

They wiped out so many "partisans"! Eight hundred in Rudnya alone. And almost as many in Kurin. In Lavstyki. In Smuga. In Kovali... Fire swept the entire district. They shot and burnt peasant children, women and men and then clap, clap, clapped their hands, applauding themselves, as near the Kurin cemetery. They made speeches, naturally copying their Berlin führers. Clap, clap, clap! — they had carried out their task, their plan. And higher up they had their own, broader, general plan, and their own arithmetic, involving millions of lives. Tens, if not hundreds, of millions. They threatened the whole world. They prepared meetings, speeches and "festivities" for when, at last, Moscow, Leningrad and other cities, which seemed "superfluous" to the Berlin maniac, would be stamped out together with their inhabitants. "So as not to have to feed them with southern grain." Because they already considered that stolen, pirated grain to be their own.

And in the meantime, as part of that same madness, that same "plan", they destroyed the village of Karpilovka in that same Oktyabrsky District.

Pavel Leontyevich Paltsev, who gives the following account, was a witness of these events. He remembers everything, with details women do not usually note. Like a true partisan he vengefully retains in his memory the doings, faces and names of the nazis' hirelings as well — the polizei "mutts" from near and far.

"...They came here in April of forty-two. The partisans had gone. The civilian population remained. Well, they gathered the people in the club and began to ask about the partisans. No one revealed anything, the people didn't say.

"We don't have any partisans here, that's all.

The partisans were former captives, but they've gone and our people are all home.'

"Then one policeman, he was from the Bobruisk garrison, well, I mean, he said: 'If that's so, that there are no partisans, then you're partisans, you bandit mugs!'

"I was also standing in the club. They had placed the women on one side and the men on the other. There were about sixty men there, of different ages: both old and younger ones. Well, he was holding a list, and there were names on the list. And he asked: 'Kovalevich Grisha?'

"And the women say: 'Kovalevich Grisha is in the army.'

"We had a Kovalevich who ground grain for the partisans. He was an invalid. And the women say: 'He's in the army.'

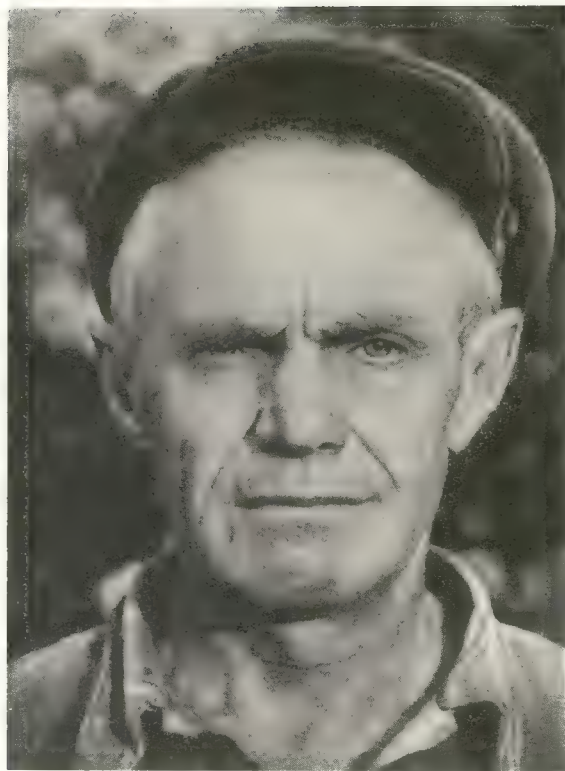
"And the polizei says: 'How can he be in the army when he grinds grain for the partisans?'

"So the women fell silent, seeing that he knew... And he put that list in his pocket and went to the commandant, talked some there. And the commandant probably gave the order to shoot. Well, then he comes out and immediately begins to count in German: 'Drei, vier...'

"He counted off ten men and took them out into the street. A polizei counted them off, but in German. I don't know where he was from, but his name was Shubin. He had a gold tooth... He counted off those ten men and took them out. Well, we thought, where did he take them, maybe just for an interrogation or something. And then we hear shooting in the stables. Well, so I end up in the second batch then. He only hands the people over: takes ten men outside, hands them over to the Germans and they escorted them farther. My wife was also in the club, but my children — one of them was four — hid on top of the stove at home. Well, so I ended up in the next group of ten. And ten Germans went with us, with rifles.

**"These people were shot with tommy-guns and
rifles ... in a most humane possible way..."**

SS Obersturmführer Schubert



Pavel Paltsev



Ten Germans escorted ten men. Well, they brought us to the stables and ordered: 'Stand with your heads facing the wall.'

"Well, we stood along the wall and bent our heads, I had on a sheepskin coat, and I raised the collar like so, looked around, and they had already put the cartridges in the bore and were on the ready. And, either out of fright or who knows why, I – my legs are giving way... And so they shot. Ten rifles in a volley and inside a building – the boom was deafening, like from a cannon. A ringing began in my ears, I fell and didn't know whether I was killed or alive. Well, I lay there. Then the noise in my ears began to clear up, and I began to come to and don't believe my senses: am I alive or not. I don't believe my senses, but my eyes can see. Then I hear talking. Polizeis, two of them, are standing there and speaking Russian. The Germans ger-gerred, shot and left. And these... It was quiet and you could hear someone speaking Russian. So I'm lying there. I don't remember how long I lay there – an hour or two. I simply fell asleep, my heart was probably weakening, and I simply fell asleep. Then I hear them bringing another group, they shot about five more groups of men. Then came the women. My wife is there wailing and shouting: 'Sir, I have children!...'

"Well, so they brought the women, too, probably they were already shooting in a disorderly fashion, any which way, because women rushed about. Well, then, two or three hours passed after they'd finished shooting. Silence – you couldn't hear a thing in the stables. I lay there like that, lay there, and now really came to my senses, felt that I was alive. Unhurt, not wounded or anything. Ah yes, and then I feel that someone is wiggling along my back. One of those that was shot, and he's wiggling on top of me, he was wounded obviously. I had just thought that a German would shoot

him and hit me, I had just thought that when a German probably walked by and saw him. He finished him off and a bullet hit me right here, in the thigh. But not in the bone, only the flesh. Like a lash. But I keep on lying as I have been. And I feel the blood is just running out of me... And that guy stopped wiggling...

"Well, then I listened, got up – there was no one... The village was about fifty or sixty metres from the stables. There were lots of Germans in the village – the street was full of them. But here there wasn't anyone. I thought, if I run out – there are Germans all around, they'll shoot me. Better wait until they set the village on fire, to run under cover of the smoke. Be what may! So I ran along the gutter, there was an iron bridge, it's still there crossing the stream. I dove under that bridge, threw off my sheepskin coat and – git!... I ran, and no one shot at me. Then I ran up to the stream – the Neretovka – drank some water and looked to see whether anyone was running after me. I thought that if skiers or cavalrymen began to chase after me I'd throw everything off, be naked but run away. Surely I would! There were some bushes not far from there. Well, you know, nobody chased after me.

"One woman saw me running. She is still alive today. Marya Rulega.

"Well, I made for the woods...

"At first we didn't have any weapons, but after that pogrom we started to get some weapons, those who survived, and all went into the woods.

"Basically Germans were there, when the people were being killed, but there were polizeis, too, even local ones. There were polizeis from Rudnya. One polizei came from Smykovichi, his name was Los. I know, I worked with him before the war.

"Well, he was pardoned, he even came in a hat. The inhabitants of Smykovichi were going to kill

him, but he guessed it and got out. He's still alive today. I don't know, maybe he's on pension now. There was also a polizei called Govorovsky from Zazerye. He was chairman of the collective farm before the war. I myself saw them with my own eyes.

"That Los was eating salt pork in his wagon and smiling, I saw him through the window. He even had some relatives there. They begged him: 'Maximka, save us!'

"There was this Matruna, a relative of his. Ooh, he didn't even pay any attention to her... Now he's working in the Komi Autonomous Republic, his stepmother lives in Smykovichi and she even tried to get some kind of certificate for a pension for him. He already lost his health there or something, I don't know, only she was after a certificate... He came here recently, but I didn't see him then, I saw him right after the war when I came back from the army. He was carrying pails: he made stoves or something. I says to him: 'You scum... Thus and so...'

"He lowered his head, just didn't say a word. He felt ugly, you see. That's how it was..."

You see, now they feel "ugly", those men, among our people. And they're understandably afraid of meeting people's eyes. But they live on and not only do not look for the nearest tree to hang themselves from, but even have thoughts about a pension...

As for their accessories in crime, those ultimate degenerates who even considered themselves their ideologists and have now hidden behind the façade of western intelligence services, they don't even lower their heads or eyes. At the top of their lungs they shout (perhaps in order to drown out that incessant, horrible shrieking of children and women!...), shout that although they served the nazis they were a "third force" and even "saved

people"...

How much they would give not to see all this in the mirror of the people's memory! Not to see their own face there, next to the bestial grin of the bastard nazi. A face like this one, like these, only even more frightening, even more loathsome...

But we've gone over to the postwar present...

Back in 1942 Volga Minich is still pulling her sled through all the horrors and hell of Oktyabrsky District, trying to save the helpless man she loves.

After burning down the villages the Germans began to press people in the woods as well. Wherever they could and however they could, the partisans saved the civilian population from the "plan", but they were still lacking in strength, weapons and ammunition. And they and the women, old men and children were confronted with front-line divisions... It was only later, at the end of 1942 and in 1943, that Oktyabrsky District became inaccessible to the SS men and their henchmen.

In the meantime, Volga Minich, like thousands of other women with a similar fate, continues to dash desperately in the ring of fire.

"...The partisans had gone, and the Germans followed after the partisans along that path, and I went on behind. Morning would come and I'd see where I'd come out.

"And I came out onto the tracks, the railway tracks. The sun was rising. I stopped: there's a path going along the tracks – a path running along one side of the tracks and one along the other. But I think: 'I'll go along the track: it's higher and you can see.' I walked about five hundred metres from the crossing and came upon about ten people sitting around a campfire, women. I sat down to rest opposite them.

"'My dears,' I says, 'maybe you have some-

thing to eat. This is the third day I've been on the road, I can't go any farther, I haven't even had a drop of water in my mouth.'

"They say: 'Our men have gone to Zatishye, maybe they'll be able to get something there, but we don't have anything with us. Stay with us.'

"There were two children and nine women.

"I thought: 'They've gone, but will they get anything, and when will they come back?...' My husband, I see, is already done for, he isn't tossing anymore, his mouth doesn't close anymore and on his teeth there is this... I'd take my mitten and wipe it off. He was almost as good as dead.

"I had a sister in Dyomenka. 'I'll follow the track there,' I thought. I somehow couldn't make up my mind to rest near them.

"I walked on about five hundred metres maybe and see: oh, my God, Germans are driving toward me. The same ones as had gone to make the ambush...

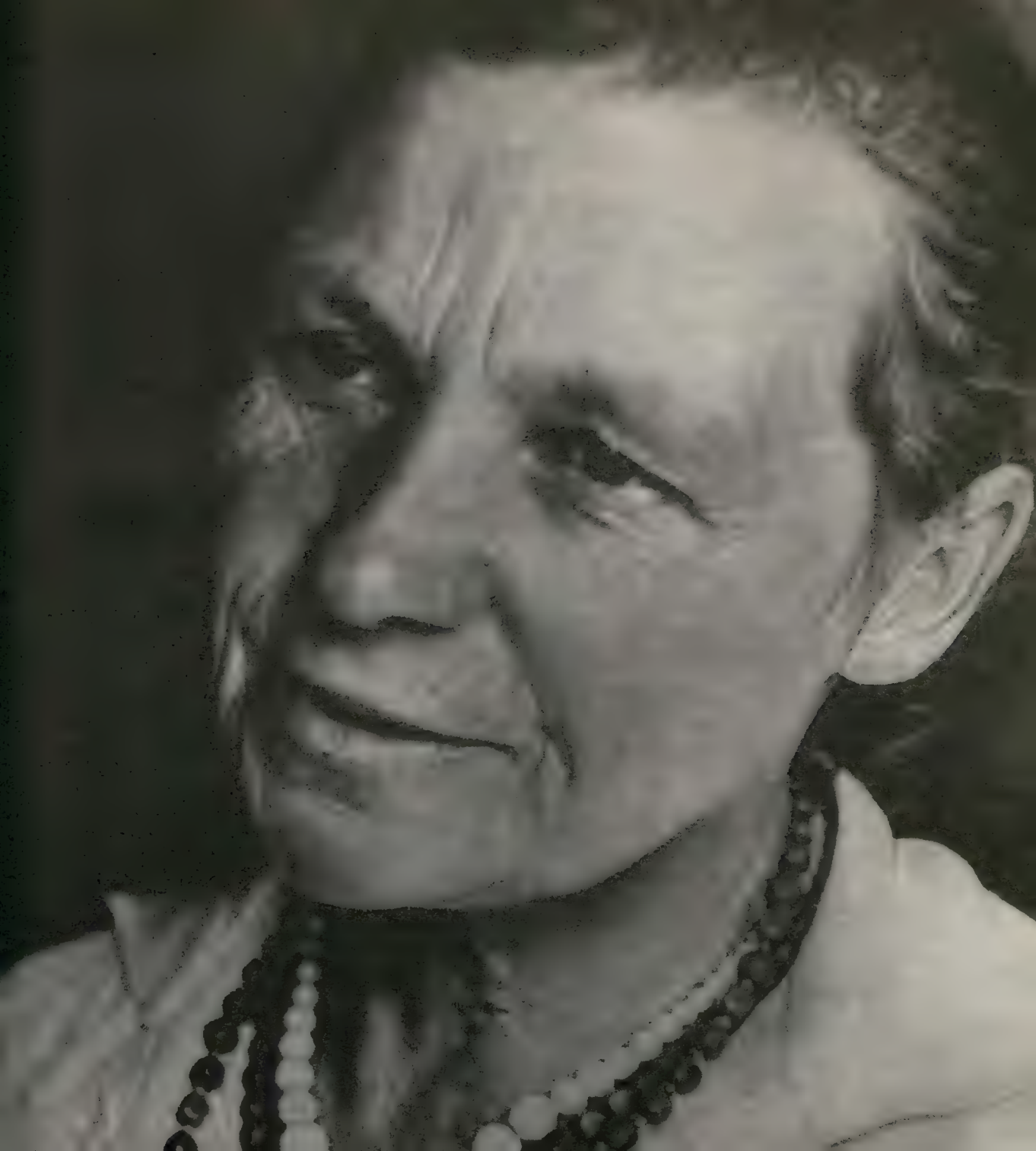
"If I had abandoned him on the tracks I wouldn't have been wounded, but I ran off to the side with the sled. I saw that a German had rushed after me. And I abandoned the sled. I ran and ran, stumbling, but they couldn't shoot at me because they'd noticed those others near the fire. And if they'd shot at me, those would all have run away. They didn't shoot at me until they'd surrounded those others. And then the German shot several times, saw that I broke into a run and blood was dropping onto the snow behind me. I didn't even feel that the bullet had cut through my arm here — no pain or anything... If I hadn't seen the blood I wouldn't have felt that I really was wounded... The German followed in my tracks and then turned back. He went up to my sled...

"What they did there nobody knows: he was almost dead...

"Well, I went into the forest, walked and walked and found them all, that detachment that had

"... Then they set us on fire. Some kind of black bottle. And they didn't even light the fire—just doused the house and it started to burn. They closed the door, smashed the window and began throwing in grenades. Chucked in one, a second, a third... And my body is burning all over... I was wounded by a splinter here. I saw what had happened to the others, who was killed, wounded, who was nearly burnt already... Lord!... I dragged the table to the window, pulled him up onto the table, my husband, and then crawled out myself through the window.

"And I felt that I was wounded here, that my flesh had been torn away here. And the grenade had hit him right here beneath the knees: it tore up his veins and everything there, there was no way he could get up... I dragged him three kilometres... I'd drag him a ways, stop a bit, and then I just lost my strength, I couldn't drag him any more."



been sitting in the barn. Well, I told them how it had been, that it was not they I had ended up waiting for but the Germans. I told it all as it was. But the commander doesn't believe me... He gave an order to two fellows: 'Put her in the cart and take her to Zatishye!...'

"They brought me to Zatishye, left me in the middle of the village. I went into a few houses: they were all empty, the water had frozen in the pails, I couldn't find anything. 'Well, this is the end,' I think, 'Lord! Where is this death? Where can I find it, this death?...' I couldn't find any people, there wasn't anybody.

"I walked and walked, beyond Zatishye, until I came to Bubnovka. In Bubnovka this woman was carrying milk. She'd milked her cow and was carrying milk into the woods. I asked and she poured me a glass. I drank down the glass, but threw up at once. Who knows why, I hadn't eaten for three days already. I asked her whether Dyomenka was whole.

" 'They said,' she says, 'that partisans were there yesterday and that the Germans burnt only two homesteads. Partisans'. Otherwise the entire village is whole. They rounded up the people, kept them for some time and then let them go.'

"Well, I do so long to rest. I feel that if I sit down in the road, I don't know how much later I'll get up... I went into a field, sat down under a fir tree, sat there for a while and couldn't get up. No matter how I tried I just couldn't get up. I had no strength left, couldn't even raise my arm. I even fell asleep there. And you know, it was my fate to live longer. Partisans came along from our village, from that Dyomenka. They recognized me, tried to wake me and couldn't. They went into the village, got a sled and brought me to my sister. They brought me to my sister, lifted me off the sled, tried to wake me and they told me later I had muttered something unconsciously.

"I slept for a day and a night. And when I woke up and came to my senses I tore all the clothes on me!... Then I asked the partisans and they took me to that place where I had abandoned him. We walked up. The sled was where I had left it. And they had killed all of them, all of those around the fire! People said that they had twisted the children's necks. Two little girls, and they had wrung their necks like roosters', put them to death... A certain Garbuz from Kurin buried them all. He is still alive now. And there were some other people, too. And my husband was buried there somewhere, too. I don't even know his grave..."

Volga Andreyevna could not calm down after telling about that horrible pre-spring period of 1942, because this wasn't the end of her sufferings. Her story carries us two years forward, to the no less fearful days of the last winter of occupation.

"...Well, now we're living in Dyomenka, and the blockade started up again here. Such a blockade that you couldn't hide in the woods or anywhere. We were caught inside our huts, they caught us. But then we ran away, they burnt everything in our village, everything to the last ounce, nothing was left. We built another hut.

"And then one day this shooting came from far away. We got together: how could we all get off the island? People are talking it over – we're standing on the brushwood road across the marsh – where shall we go?... And we had just strapped on our bags, those of us that had some, when they yelled at us: 'Stop, Russian...' and began to cuss. Those who could, ran away. But I already had a babe in arms then, a one-and-a-half-year-old boy. I had given birth to my first child in Dyomenka at my sister's. And my sister's little boy had been left with me.

"Demyan wanted to ride away on horseback, but a German shot the horse, grabbed Demyan by the collar and dragged him over here.

"They put us in line, forty people in line, and began to shoot.

"That same man Demyan's boy was ahead in line. His mother and her daughter were standing in back, behind some other people. When they began to shoot, Demyan was the first. They shot him in the back of the head — he just fell, didn't say a word, not a word. And the boy is already walking forward, poor thing, walking forward and saying: 'Oh, I'm afraid, oh, I'm afraid!' And when they shot him he cried out: 'Oh, I'm not afraid!', and fell."

QUESTION: "That's what he cried?"

"Yes. First: 'Oh, I'm afraid!' and then: 'Oh, I'm not afraid!' He was about twelve.

"Well, when they had shot the lad, she, his mother, that was standing at the very end, called out: 'Oh wait, sirs, at least let it be by families. I'll come along, too.'

"The mother came up and told her daughter: 'Go ahead, Volga, you, too.'

"They shot the daughter and then the mother walked up:

"'I'll go myself.'

"And she took her head in her hands like this and plunked herself under her killed husband. And the German shot her in the neck — he fired and she jerked her head, and her leg... He shot her three times and three times she did that...

"We're all standing there and I have my sister's little boy, about seven maybe, and mine is a year and a half. Everything is burning here inside me, it seems, bursting — what am I to do?... Should, you know, the children go first, or me?...

"And this guy came, wearing glasses, and stopped the shooting. They stopped shooting. He spoke Russian and searched our pockets.

"And they, you know, had ridden into a swamp — they were riding on horses, on horseback — and the horses couldn't break the ice because they'd cut their legs. So they sent us to do it. We go and break the ice with our hands, and they follow after us, on horseback. And I push my kid a little ways over the ice and break that ice. We broke up the whole hollow with our bare hands and cut up our hands. We scrambled out of that hollow, and those who had some little bag with them changed shoes. And our neighbour's mother, she was old, she got out of the water, poor thing, and didn't have any bundle. She didn't change shoes and her legs got so numb, so froze, she just fell to her knees. And he came up, this German, and hit her between the shoulders with his knee — she shut up. He shot her, too.

"Well, they're driving us along, driving us along... And this little boy... His pants had fallen off, he was naked. He's walking with his bare legs, can't go any further his legs are so frozen. And this German fired an explosive bullet at him... His little guts fell out, he's moaning and groaning, and they don't let us look back at that little boy. We went on and you could hear that boy moaning.

"I knew that any minute we'd come upon the partisans' huts. But the Germans don't know where the place is...

"And sure enough the partisans saw from their huts that... They were driving us ahead of them. The Germans were on horseback and we were in front — there were about twenty women that were left, and they had shot about twenty. And those partisans began to shoot at the Germans. We fell flat and started crawling toward the huts. The Germans also fell flat, and they killed two of them then, Germans, in the Rudnitsky swamp.

"We crawled up to the partisans' huts, and that's how we were left alive."

QUESTION: "And what happened to your little boy, the baby?..."

"My little boy died, poor thing, it was too much for him..."

QUESTION: "What kind of family do you have now?"

"My present husband enlisted in the regular army before the war. He left his wife, mother and son behind, and when he came back he found nobody left. And he and I got together, got married, orphans that we were. And we have six children of our own. Our children are already grown up and educated, the youngest is already thirteen now. All of them, thank God, are alive: three daughters and three sons. Two are in Bobruisk, one girl works as an economist in communications and one son, you know, graduated from the forestry college in Bobruisk, and the second daughter is a third-year student at the teachers' training college in Pinsk. And one of the fellows is in the army. He finished an eleven-year school. The third daughter is in the tenth form, and the youngest boy in the fifth."

QUESTION: "And your first husband, was he also from around here?"

"Yes. His last name was Zaitsev. It's now I'm Minich. His brother is a team leader here. We were friendly, I was friendly with him for three years. I was willing to be together, you know I'd asked that partisan doctor to poison me and my husband, so we could die together... And in general, I'm such a person ... if you have to die, then die together..."

The towel is still lying on her lap, but her tears have already dried up...

Volga Andreyevna sits in silence at the end of her tale. We are silent, too.

And in the midst of this silence she suddenly remembers something:

"...God, God, there's something else I forgot!... This thing happened that I really blame myself for. It was back then during the first blockade, in forty-two. The Lord knows, as long as I live, that's how long I'll carry the blame!... This woman, she had a nephew with the partisans, and the younger boys, his little brothers, were at home. When they, the Germans, started to hurl grenades into houses, that woman grabbed both her little girls and those boys. She jumped out of the house and yelled: 'Run, children, run for your life!...'

"The girls, they were quite big, they ran after their mother, and those two little boys – I can't imagine how old they were – they ran a bit together with their aunt, and then they didn't know where she had got to.

"I was dragging my husband, already in the evening it was, and do you know, right there, about thirty metres from me, there they were walking back, those little fellows were walking back, hand in hand, to the village. And why I didn't have the wits, really and truly it's just downright unforgivable! Why couldn't I have said: 'Children, turn back!' Somehow my mind... It's just that I was distraught. And only afterwards, the next day, I came to my senses. And so even today, whenever I see two little kids like those, I never fail to remember those children. And I blame myself: why didn't I turn them back, those children?... And they went on and no one knows what happened to them. Maybe they, the Germans, threw them into the fire, too?..."

You really are a tender-hearted person, Volga Andreyevna! And however well, however happily you may be living now, you will never forget what happened then. And those little boys will continue to walk hand in hand through the snow, the bloody snow of your memory.

Now no longer only yours...

I Also Came From a Village of Fire

The recollections that have been quoted here were collected by us over the course of four years. And we set out to collect them nearly three decades after the events themselves.

What do they represent, these recollections and accounts taped after so much time had passed? How much of a document are they? And what kind of a document are they?

We are not afraid of asking the question ourselves, because we, who saw and heard these people – very different and at the same time very similar in some way – know the answer.

Yes, this is a document, a psychological and social document. And not only a document of how today, in the 1970s, people remember the wartime Khatyns, but also an extremely weighty document on the truth of the events themselves, even though more than a quarter of a century has passed since that time.

The truth of these accounts is primarily psychological. People have such exact memories of what happened to them personally and how it happened, how they felt, perceived and saw it all, that the truth not only convinces you but at times sounds simply unbearable as well. Memory sees those horrible events at such point-blank range and so suddenly, so immediately brings you within their compass, gives you a close-up view of them that in a way you yourself become a witness of them – not a mere listener or spectator, but a witness of what happened...

"I'm not from that one, but I'm also from a village of fire..." we heard in Shumilino District, Vitebsk Region.

The woman was speaking of her village, but she could just as well have been referring to her memory: "of fire"!

The psychological truth of these accounts is no small guarantee of the exactitude of all their other aspects, including factual. Of course, mistakes are

possible, lapses of memory (as to what happened when, people's last names, the sequence of events), but in such cases we tried to get more precise information.

Some former partisans told us how the members of a punitive expedition were exterminated on the Mogilev-Bobruisk highway – part of the same SS men who killed 1,800 civilians in Borki.

Alexei Andreyevich Ananich:

"...There were about sixty of them. SS men. But what was striking was that when we took their bayonets they were all bloody. It was one of the groups that had taken part in the massacre at Borki..."

Ivan Sergeyevich Ananich:

"...We took their knapsacks, and there were children's things in them. We even took out those Finnish knives of theirs, and they were bloody. They had knifed people and thrown them into the fire..."

The tape preserves our insistent (maybe even too insistent) questions: what was it like, how did it all really happen? There were sixty SS men and over a hundred partisans, lying in ambush to boot – it was possible to wipe out the nazis without losing a single man. Only one partisan was wounded.

But, as we learned, the battle did not have an entirely successful start.

Ivan Sergeyevich Ananich:

"...The vehicles were still five hundred metres away from us when some of our men began to put cartridges in their cartridge-chambers. And one partisan accidentally fired his gun. The Germans heard the shot. They alighted, the driver opened the door and drove along slowly. And the Germans are walking along the ditch..."

Under these circumstances how could the battle have ended bloodlessly for the partisans? Wasn't this a bit of a tall-tale? We honestly doubted that everything in the account was exact.

"And how many of them were there altogether?"

"They say there were about sixty of them."

"You killed them all?"

"All."

"And how many vehicles were there?"

"Three, I think."

"And only one of your men was wounded?"

"Yes. We only had one wounded."

"They obviously didn't all take that road, for Borki was a very big village and more Germans than that had come to it."

"Yes, maybe part of them went in the direction of Mogilyov. We were lying in ambush in the direction of Bobruisk."

Then after thoroughly quizzing some more people, we became convinced that it really had been so: Arkad Antyukh, the commander of the company of partisans, had truly conducted a wonderfully successful battle. Everything had happened just as Ivan and Alexei Ananich had told us.

Here is the rest of **Ivan Ananich's** story:

"...He gives the order not simply to make an ambush but to engage in a real frontal battle. We feel we have enough ammunition — we decided to do battle. To this end we drew up the platoons in an L-shaped formation. The commander gave the right-wing platoon the order to intersect the highway as soon as the battle started and form a ring so it would be easier to deal with them..."

"Well, the battle began. Our men had already started to run across from there to surround them but — there was this German machine-gunner. I ran across into the ditch where the Germans were and, while our men came running up, killed the machine-gunner and his second number, too, and then at that very moment I was hit in the leg... I sat down and five minutes passed while they bandaged me up, and the battle, the operation, was already all over. The guys ran up and crushed them, literally in five minutes..."

Of course, we could only try to elicit information in this way from the former partisans, quizzing them in a friendly fashion (may they forgive us for it!). You can't probe the stories of the women and old men who went through all the horrors in such an open way. In the latter case we tried to question as many people as possible, specially drawing their attention to this or that fact (a date, the number of victims, names, the sequence of events, etc.); searched for materials in local museums, looked through district Party committee and district executive committee documents, used source materials and special archives.

But all this relates to the "external" facts. As for what people experienced themselves, lived through, what they did and what the nazi brutes

... And the women, seemingly without changing their tone, begin loudly saying that "yes, we had our share, and how, it was enough for anyone! "
... First of all you see the eyes, arrested on something there, in the past...





did to them, this a Teklya Kruglova or a Volga Minich can tell you about in such a way and with such details that many things can be clarified through their recollections. Their accounts are not scaled to a village or district or even all of Byelorussia. These women have something to tell to the whole world.

They live among other present-day people, these present-day people we sought, traveling from region to region, from district to district, from village to village. We went by lists provided by regional Party and Soviets' executive committees, then by district Party and Soviets' executive committees, and finally followed the living chain of human memory: if a person happened to mention a fact, name or village, we would drive there and find a new chain leading to other facts and to people that are, perhaps, not to be found anywhere, in any books or papers. The chain leads to more and more new people, reminiscences, tragedies, human suffering and inhuman cruelty, and immediately carries you, together with the sun and the street filled with children's faces and voices and the houses and the woods and the road, more than three decades back.

Our vehicle stops in the middle of a sandy, somehow excessively wide street. This "spacious" planning arose after the fires and postwar depopulation. We strike up a conversation with the women sitting, as they usually do on Sundays, under the old, prewar birches. Children are playing around nearby, although there aren't very many of them in the villages today.

We begin the conversation differently under different circumstances, but most often straight off with explanations of who we are and why we've come.

"Oh, do you think it's easy to remember that?"

"Please tell it just one more time," we prevail upon them in an apologetic voice. "We'll tape

it, it will get published, so people can know..."

But it happens that we put off this conversation, because we ourselves want an ordinary, present-day conversation, want today's sun to remain, do not want the laughter and children's voices to vanish...

We start with something else, remote: "Is this Pogulyanka (Funtown-*Tr.*)? Your village is still called that today? Your grandmothers and grandfathers must have been jolly people to call it that."

"Why's that? So you think we're no fun?"

There, we've only complicated our task. Just try to broach *that* subject now.

"During the war here..."

And the women, seemingly without changing their tone, begin loudly saying that yes, "we had our share, and how, it was enough for anyone!". But a few faces have already somehow drawn apart from the rest. You notice it at once. First of all you see the eyes, arrested on something there, in the past...

These people live like everyone else, many even have new families, and lots of children, also "new ones". No, their faces and eyes are not necessarily sorrowful or stern, although this is so in the majority of cases. Some of them bear an incomprehensible grin, of which the person himself seems unaware. No, the person is entirely normal. What is abnormal is what he knows and remembers, what people who came out of the fire remember.

We didn't find **Emilia Karlovna Partasyonok** home at first. Her neighbours helped us but couldn't find her either. "She just was here with us, where did she run off to — maybe she's gone to the other end." The little boys playing

with old car tires authoritatively explained: "Granny Amilya doesn't sit home!"

When, on our way back from another village, we again turned into Zasovye (Logoisk District, Minsk Region), Emilia Karlovna was already waiting for us in her house, a little confused and bewildered: who could need her so much (and why) that after dropping by once they had promised (through the neighbours) to come back again specially. The first thing she told us was: "I live alone: I can't bear people to shout or knock about."

She can't bear it. But she also can't bear being by herself, and so she can't sit still in her quiet little house.

"...As soon as I start telling about it I begin to shake all over..." (*She laughs.*)

This unexpected laugh is disquieting and seems to frighten even her. With a wrinkled black hand clenched in a fist she tries to conceal her smiling old lips. And both the fist and the lips are trembling, like those of a little child about to wail with pain or hurt...

"...I begin to shake all over..."

"The Germans came to Litvichi to take the young people off to Germany, but the partisans sneaked up and began to fight them there... And they came back again early on Sunday to Litvichi. And then they came to us at noon. Then they ordered us... There was this Zhavoronok, our village headman, a local fellow. When the partisans would come he'd collect what they needed, and when the Germans came he also got what they wanted. Well, they ordered the headman to gather eggs... People were mighty scared, you know... I was alone with my two girls, and I was also scared. I didn't leave my house. I was mighty scared of them, those Germans. (*She laughs.*)

"They began to go around from house to house.

They came to us, too. My girls were still quite young.

"My first cousin lived right here, so I went to him. I asked him what would happen, maybe they'd take us to Germany. My girls... One of them was already sixteen. And he said: 'They won't take any of us. There is no one from Zasovye either with the partisans or the police, anywhere...'

"Well, I went home and went to bed with those two girls of mine. The next morning I woke one of them up to let out the cow. Over where my aunt lived and I had planted potatoes, that's where my plot of land was. Well, this little cellar had been dug on the plot, with a wooden roof strewn with earth. So I told my daughter to tend to the cow while I ran to get some potatoes. I took some kind of dish... (*She laughs.*) And suddenly they're standing there, near my aunt's, five of them. One woman went up to them and asked something. And I went up to her afterwards and softly asked: 'Viktya, what did they say to you?'

"'I asked whether I could drive my cow out into the field,' she says, 'and they said only onto the common.'

"Then I took to heels and passed by them at a run. And they didn't say anything to me. I went into my aunt's house. And she says maybe they'll kill people, because they killed people in Litvichi, this lad said. He was a relative of hers. He was lying on the stove, he'd come from Litvichi. Run away. He had also been bringing a cow here. Well, they killed the cow, too... When they started to kill people. Then I quickly made for the cellar - I'd rake up some potatoes and run to the children. One I'd woken up, and the other was sleeping...

"I was just starting to climb out... And I had this cousin, he lived at my aunt's: there was a famine where they lived, in the Ukraine, and so

he had come here. Well, he's coming toward me and says in Ukrainian: 'Amilya, they're shooting over there for some reason.'

"And I say: 'Climb in here, hide...'

"There in her cellar there was this partition. He crawled over there into that corner, and I squatted down there like this. The cellar was deep and I had a long sheepskin coat on. But I was barefoot. So I squatted down there like this and sat there. I sat next to the door. Quiet like. Then I see that this woman, my neighbour, is shouting something. I opened the door a crack and says to him: 'It looks like Gaiduchikha is asking to be sent to Germany...'

"She had a family of eleven, and they're driving her into the house to kill her. I'm sitting next to the door and he's over there in the corner. And he coughs. I say: 'Don't cough, sit there quietly.'

"And when you're sitting there in the earth the shooting inside the house is muffled. I heard two shots in my aunt's house... And he says to me: 'Have a look at what's going on there.'

"I look and see two Germans walking down the hill — Zhavoronok lived there and we all called it Zhavoronok's hill. They're walking in our direction from that hill. After the two shots at my aunt's, I hear them — thud-thud — walking through the yard. One of them came up and opened those doors. I can still see him now..."

And the old woman grins once more, covering her mouth with a fist tiny as a child's but black with age. As though she felt uncomfortable about all that happened to her. And about everyone. About the fact that she so absurdly, so childishly hid, crawled in there without understanding anything, while some strangers came along from

somewhere and ran around looking for her to kill her...

"...Better had he killed me..."

"He's holding a rifle in his hands and I'm sitting there. He looked at me, and I at him... Then he closed the door and went away.

"And I keep sitting there. And that lad keeps saying: 'See what's going on.'

"So I open the door, listen and peek out... And then I see that the house at the end of the village is already burning, and I say: 'Oh-oh, the Germans are already killing people, Stepan Gromovich's house is already burning.'

"Then I also crawled over to him in that corner and didn't sit near the doorway anymore. They set fire to the house, but the shed was left, and opposite the shed was that cellar of ours. Then another one popped into the cellar. But he doesn't see us — because I'm not there anymore, I'd already crawled over into the corner. He hummed to himself, hopped out and set that shed on fire. As soon as the shed started to burn — it was warm and dry, you know — the boards and branches that our little cellar was roofed with began to burn. The flames just licked across the boards. If I'd been by myself, I would have burnt up in there for fear, but he, after all, was a man already (*she laughs*), and he says to me: 'Amilya, let's run away!'

"He jumped up, but the door was already burning... We had a barrel in there filled with beets chopped up for kvass, and I took a dish to sprinkle the doors with the juice and crawl out... But we got burnt — our hands and face got burnt, both his and mine... We dashed behind the shed, and the shed had already burnt down.

"We lay in the potatoes that were planted there. And he says: 'They can see us here...'

"The roosters are crowing, the cows that were left are lowing, a cuckoo on the oak – an oak stood there – is cuckooing..."

"Well, then we crawled on our bellies across the swamp."

"Our neighbour carried out his little daughter... They had fired at her twice and only shot through her kerchief, but she was unhurt, she hid behind the stove. They dashed out in the smoke, when the house was burning. And then they saw us and called to us. And we sat there together."

QUESTION: "What about your girls?"

"One they burnt. They killed her in the house where I left her sleeping. The other one sat in the pasture next to the cow. And they shot at her but didn't hit her. There was the frame for a house there and she rolled in under there."

"The Germans had come in the evening and spent the night in people's houses. There were clerks there, who sat writing. And early in the morning, at sunrise, the Germans started to chase after people and kill them..."

There are some feelings and experiences whose expression in an ordinary fashion (through tears or laughter) seems inappropriate. Perhaps Mother Nature did not give man any other more "appropriate" ones. She simply did not know what her most intelligent children would encounter one day...

Some of the pictures we took of women show the same unexpected grin. You understand it when you see it, not in the picture, but on the living face, when you hear the person's voice. And then you even concur with it in a way: a person who has lived through and with his own eyes seen such horrors has the right to say things, to

draw conclusions that may bring a chill to your heart.

"...The Germans advanced on us like this – one party from Koptsevichi and the other, from that direction over there. We were in the street. That's where they rounded us up, in the street, and drove us way over there, to the end of the village. And there was this thing on wheels there... I don't know what it is. We thought they'd shoot us. But they came after us and drove us in groups into sheds and houses. I ended up in the second group. I was there alone and with me was my husband's sister, a young girl. Well, they drove her into the first group and wounded her in the house, she crept out and fell into a well. Or maybe they threw her in there. I don't know. I ended up in the barn, and then Pavel broke down the doors and we ran away. We were all burning, and that barn was burning. We started to run away and they began to shoot at us. Six of us tried to run away: old Lukashevichikha, Sergei's mother, and Vera Tokalina's mother ran out of the barn together with me, and Auntie Darya ran away... They killed them, and we were left, the three of us. I ran behind this little haystack and sat down there. The haystack rustled and they shot at it. And I was left alive. I was born in nineteen twenty myself, and my children were in the woods then, I had two children. I didn't understand yet, I thought: our houses are good ones, new, I'll go ask them not to burn them. Because people said they'd burn buildings, but no one even thought they'd burn people and shoot them..."

"As soon as I raised my head from behind the haystack they shot at me and I started to run, and then I saw Yeva Gorban sitting behind a haystack. Here she is. (*She points to her neighbour.*) I wanted



Partisan trails



Vera Kakora



Emilia Partasyonok

to take her with me, but she said: 'I don't have any legs'. So I just left her. I didn't feel sorry about anything, you see, I didn't even feel sorry about my children, I left them, I didn't even feel sorry about myself. I don't know who picked them up, my children. I myself ran into the woods..."

These are the words of **Vera Timofeyevna Kakora** from the village of Velikiye Selyutichi, Petrikov District.

But maybe she slandered herself? She "didn't feel sorry" about her own children, you see, or herself, or her neighbours.

One might ask why a person would slander himself.

It would seem to run counter to all logic.

But, such a person might ask, is there much "logic" in the world? In a world where such things happened, where such things are possible? And so he just tells things as they were, truly, without compassion either for himself or for those who will listen. His narrative sounds like a cruel challenge: you can be horrified if you want, you can be indignant! This is what the world is like, so don't you expect anything of me!...

The people who lived through this and are now living among us are some of the strongest. Most of them departed from this world either immediately or shortly after the war, in the wake of their suffering, of their children and parents who perished in such a frightful manner.

But these others keep their hold on life. Some are held by a new family, new children, their work, grandchildren to take care of; others, the lone survivors, are kept alive perhaps precisely by the memory of their loss, because people do not want what was most dear to them to disappear for

good along with them, and resist this. Because even the dead can die "even more" completely — for good. A mother will save even her dead child (if necessary at the cost of her own life) from this "other", new death, like **Maria Fyodorovna Kot** from the village of Velikiye Prusy, Kopyl District:

"...I got hold of my younger daughter, she was nine... Her dress is burning and so is mine... I dragged her out and brought her to the pit, where they mined the clay for the hut, and laid her in there... Then I climb back through those flames for my elder daughter... As if it wasn't enough that they killed her, now she'll burn up as well!... I reached for my daughter. She was so young and soft!..."

The mother hid her dead children in the pit. And then, once more risking her life, she went back to them. And she told us, in speaking of this, of the *shot children*:

"I crept up to the pit. *Were they alive?* Mightn't the pigs have eaten them?..."

Yes, a person can live for the sake of memory, so that in his memory his children — killed and burnt — might keep on living. Maybe this is what keeps many people alive — the force of human, of motherly love — and the memory which burns them is also what holds them fast to life.

People who came out of the fire can, like everyone else, be concerned about their pensions, and the fact that their granddaughter wasn't accepted at the institute, that they need roofing material, and hay for the cow. And we who listened to them and taped what they said were to show the most practical concern in their worries. Because it unfortunately happens that not everyone realizes that these people should be treated at least like invalids or veterans of the Great Patriotic War.

But beyond a fiery line in their memory all cares and practical interests disappear. Beyond this line they have only one concern: to tell nothing but the truth, so that people might know it. One even feels amazement at how sincerely a person can say, tell *everything* – even what does not seem to his credit...

Many accounts are not simply truthful, but even frightening in their merciless veracity. Involuntarily you even wish there were less of it. But the person goes on speaking, truly pitiless on himself.

“...One of my daughters was in Germany, they had taken my daughter away, and the other was home. Well, so he came, my husband, and my daughter came out of the forest as well, and they also brought three of the children along. And I says: ‘Anuprei, you know what, take those children and go back into the woods with them.’

“‘Oh you so and so, all you think of is hiding!...’

“My sweetie wouldn’t listen, wouldn’t listen to me! There weren’t any blankets then, and so I says to him: ‘Let’s wrap the child in sacking and make for the woods.’ He starts swearing again. And now the Germans are already coming. And so I says to him: ‘Like hell you and me’ll get away now. At least take my daughter now!’

“She was a fine daughter, she’d already finished seventh grade.

“‘Just run the way those people are running!’

“He grabbed her, he did, and they ran off.

“And then – wherever did the Germans come from! – they encircled us all round. A fat chance we had of running away!... A policeman calls him back. He came back, and they shot him right here in the yard. He’s walking into the yard like this, and I’m shrieking: ‘Oh my God! Where are you going? If you’d run away, damned if they’d have

shot you.’

“I was shouting at myself really, not of him. First they shot him, and then my daughter, and I – oh! If only they’d shot me in the shoulder, and not in the eye!... I had two little boys: one was four, and the other six. They’re running behind me. And this German... These women told me afterwards: ‘The children were running after you, Parasya!...’

“And they, the Germans, are shooting at me – here and there, here comes a bullet, and there, dear Lord, they’ve wounded me, and the blood is gushing. And how I twisted and turned then! And who gave me the thought of not running straight, but to keep twisting, twisting and turning!... And they didn’t kill me. We had a little pond there, farther on, and I fell into that pond. But they, those vermin, didn’t go there. I’m lying in the mud. And they thought that they’d already killed me. Later I got up, all wet, and went on. I went on and said to myself: ‘My God, God, where can my sons be?’ I had three other lads, and one, the eldest, was grazing the cows, and the younger ones, the pigs. And I had said to them, when everyone was still alive: ‘Drive them away, children, or the Germans will take them. They’ll kill both the piglets and the pig.’ So they’d herded them off. And I came to them. And I didn’t even know where those children were in the woods. But something led me there – right to them! They’re sitting in the forest by these tussocks, all covered up, when I came.

“‘There you are, my dear little sons, they’ve gone and killed your father, and they’ve gone and killed Lyubka, and they’ve gone and killed Vanka and Kolka, too!’

“And they said: ‘Oh, Mummy, it’s good that at least you’re alive.’

“One of them was eight, the second was ten, and the third, who now has a brick house,

was eighteen. Well then. And what happened afterwards... Ah, if one were to tell it all, dear Lord!...

"I'm seventy one already. My married name is **Paraska Ivanovna Lutsкая**, and my maiden name is Skakun..."

That happened in the village of Pervomaisk, Rechitsa District, Gomel Region.

The sick old woman with the missing eye finishes her tale and again complains about her disobedient husband who died that way, about the Germans getting all the way to Moscow, about her son and daughter-in-law who reproach her for living all alone in her old house and not wanting to move in with them in their brick one. And she says all this with such a grin on her one-eyed face (she lost one eye as a result of her wound) and in such a voice that you involuntarily imagine her to be saying: "Well, I just ran, forgetting about everything and everyone in my horror, and all the same I didn't get away anywhere from it all, it is all still going on — inside me! Old age caught up with me, death is on its way..."

Other faces, other names, other voices, other fates. And suddenly there it is again — that same bitterness at the very bottom of the story. A person may already have a new family, children, most likely as many as were killed, and everything else that a living person needs, but all at once he bursts out at the end of his story: "I was left, but why? After that?..."

Those that hid in places like Spain or Argentina and now live in West Germany as virtuous "businessmen" and "loving fathers" are (like their defenders) so testily sure of their right to live, qualify for "the statute of limitation", as well as of their "patriotic duty" to be there among the new generations.

And these their victims, the victims of inhuman cruelty, people with burning memories, carry within them — because they are people! — the accursed questions that have tormented all the great martyrs who have suffered for man and mankind: from Dante and Shakespeare to Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky.

So what does, and what can, a person remember after so many years?

An astounding amount and, it turns out, in amazing detail — if it concerns *those* events. If only there were words to express what they experienced. But there are words, they find the words, especially the women. The men, as a rule, don't have words that so precisely render their inflamed memories. But this is not the case with all of them, as witnesses **Ivan Maximovich Savitsky's** story.

An execution squad burst into the village of Zbyshin (Kirovsk District, Mogilyov Region) just as the young partisan Savitsky* arrived from the woods to call on his sister. He hid his weapons at the edge of the forest, dashed into a shed and up into hayloft, from where he watched what was going on. And this is what this man remembers, how he remembers the incident:

"And through the gable I can see two women running across the stream. And there in front of me stood a shed. And over there there was a heavy machine-gun, and they were shooting at those running women across the stream. And so, just think! From between the planks of the gable I can see this sector where the women are running, but farther on, because of a plank in the way, I can't see anything. But they should pop out right here, where I can see again. There I'll see them

* See the chapter "Zbyshin".

again. And when the women did not pop out there from behind the plank I realized they had been killed, that they were killing people in Zbyshin..."

There is a passage in Ivan Savitsky's account where he is standing in a burning shed but can't get out right away because the killers are somewhere nearby, and he's standing in the very middle and waiting it out as long as he can, and is himself amazed that he can stand it:

"Well, you know, when a candle burns, well, it's hot around the edges, but not in the middle. The shed is burning around me, and I'm standing there. And when I just couldn't stand there any longer, when I began to get scorched, I crawled out under the wall..."

At times, especially when you listen to the women, it begins to seem as if the teller had just come from *there*. She got away and came running to people, and is now telling them what happened to her in her village, and is herself surprised, almost cannot believe, that she is alive. And she already finds it hard to believe that it really and truly happened, because here everything is as it was, and it had seemed to her that things were *like this* now everywhere, for good. ("I thought they were killing everyone right and left, all over the earth...")

Domna Vasilyevna Shchemeleva* told us that after she had found her wounded son among the bodies and carried him on her back three or more kilometres into the woods, she could not straighten out anymore and walked and lived bent over like that for a long time. Her back stayed that way several years, as though she were still carrying the dreadful weight of that day...

It is not surprising that things like this do not allow people's memory to unbend completely, to

cast everything off. People cannot do that, because they're people.

At first some people do not believe that they can remember everything, that it is all so close to them. "Oh lads, it was all so long ago!..." But after a word or two they get to the heart of the matter and suddenly remember such details, begin to stumble upon such sharp corners of their memory ... that you realize that people remember everything and always, though there are some memories which it is fearful and painful to touch upon.

There was a first time to their tale, the most painfully burning, when the person had only just escaped from that hell and come running to other people, or they had rescued him from the paws of the butchers.

Very often we got the feeling that we, too, were listening to that very first account, there was so much primal feeling to it, so much pristine grief, so many of the original, most truthful words.

At first some of the survivors fell into a stupor that lasted a long time.

In the words of Mokrina Kovalchuk from the village of Knyazhevodtsy, Mosty District, Grodno Region: "I didn't drink or eat anything then for maybe five days... They had destroyed everything, burnt everything – even the crows didn't caw. That's how frightful it was..."

And then (and some did right away) they told people. And as they told it then, for the first time and to the first people, so it has, perhaps, remained engraved in their memory. In the memories of the tellers themselves, on the fiery "tape" of their memories. It so happened that one of us had the opportunity to tape some people (in Borki Kirovskiy, Velikaya Garozha and Britsalovichy in Osipovichy District) twice. Four years had passed between the two occasions, yet it seemed as

* See the chapter "The Thirtieth".

though what he heard the second time came straight from the first tapes. The intonation, and the details, and the words — everything was almost the same. And at the same time, for feeling and spontaneity it seemed as though the tale were being told for the first time. Most often of all, barring a few exceptions, this is the case. The one story in these people's lives each time sounds as it did the first time, because it forces its way up through such suffering, through such anguish!...

You sense that some of them have told the tale many times, to their neighbours, perhaps to their children, told their new children about their brothers and sisters who were killed. But now some strangers have come from far away with various equipment and asked them to relate everything, in as much detail as possible, and their neighbours are also there, listening to what they've heard many times already or even seen with their own eyes, filling in certain details or reminding the tellers of others...

And it happens then that another "section" of memory comes into play, the memory of those sleepless nights when the narrator saw and remembered it all over and over again, down to the last detail.

How her neighbour, seeing that the Germans had surrounded the village and hearing the cry: "They'll kill us, too!" suddenly said to her eight-year-old son: "Sonny, sonny, what did you put those rubber boots on for? Your little legs will burn for a very long time in rubber boots." (**Anastasya Illarionovna Kasperova** from the village of Borki, Kirovsk District.)

the killers ran around looking for them, their helmets ringing against the ears of grain... (**Pyotr Nikolayevich Malashchenko** from the village of Lozki, Kalinkovichi District.)

Or how, after shooting the inhabitants of the neighbouring village, the members of an execution squad took shelter from the rain under the eaves along two walls of a house in which people were hiding and could hear the Germans' helmets banging hard against the walls... (**Alyona Gri-goryevna Zharchenko** from the village of Rudnya, Rossony District.)

Or what those whom the bullets had spared thought, lying among the dead, and how afraid they were: "The snow isn't melting on those who were killed, but on me it is. They'll notice!..." Or: "I shivered with cold and thought: they'll see it!..."

Again and again their memory keeps bringing up from its depths things that struck the narrators themselves with their unexpectedness, their awful incongruity with all that was going on.

Yeva Tumakova from the village of Krasnitsa in Bykhov District remembers very well how she, then still an adolescent, seeing, realizing that they were killing everyone right and left, "...popped into the house all at sixes and sevens, you know. And these strange thoughts... I was thinking I'd still live. A bundle of clothes was lying there, and I think: I'll at least take the bundle, they'll burn it all after all, and there'll be nothing to change into, I only have one set of clothes on. And then I think: they'll laugh at me and say: 'They're going to kill her, and here she is with some kind of bundle!...'"

Or how people sat hiding in a field of rye while



Even today she remembers how strangely she acted then, what strange thoughts she had. She remembers every thought she had about her own thoughts.

When we heard Matruna Grinkevich from the village of Kurin, Oktyabrsky District, say in passing that she and some other girls while escaping from death carried with them a large mirror and looked at themselves in it (they were young girls, seventeen years old after all!), we asked her again about this: "Was it really so — you ran away with a mirror?"

"...You're asking about that mirror? Aha, well when they burnt Khvoynya, our people all went off into the forest. We stayed in the forest until evening and — it was cold. I says: 'Let's go home, girls, nothing will happen!'

"There were three of us. Well, we were walking along the road, we'd taken a big mirror from the forest — we were girls after all, we didn't need to take anything there, all we wanted was to look at ourselves in the mirror... Well, we were walking along, we stopped on the hill, and the carters later said that the Germans saw us looking at ourselves in the mirror..."

People remember things like that and cannot help remembering them forever. Because they happened a step from death, when everything acquires a special scale and special meaning.

Nazism, the real face of nazism, its actual plans were such that human nature averted its eyes from it all. The horror was so great that people suddenly... fell asleep. The human mind, saving itself from total breakdown or madness, switched off.

We heard much about this sudden slumber, many people told us about it...

"...Well, we all crawled through the potato field... The men who've already been at the front understand what it's all about, they say: 'Well, they must be killing people already.'

"You could hear shots and then sirens blew. The men say: 'Well now they're going to burn the village.'"

QUESTION: "And you were in the field?"

"We were sitting in the rye field."

QUESTION: "They didn't look in the field? Did they go from house to house?"

"No, they didn't look there. They went from house to house. Maybe they looked somewhere nearer by, but no one looked where we were. Only there was this oppressive... The fear, you felt like going to sleep. Well, and when they had set it all on fire..."

QUESTION: "You felt like going to sleep?"

"You know, out of fear. Felt like going to sleep so bad out of fear! The wind was blowing in our direction, you know, this smoke, you see, this minty... People were burning, there was this oppressive smell..." (**Yeva Ivanovna Tumakova** from the village of Krasnitsa, Bykhov District)

Nature "averts its eyes" and people suddenly fall asleep, often at the most dangerous moment.

"...You want me to tell you how it all started?"

Antonina Lazarevna Kosobutko from the village of Alexichi in Khoiniki District asked. "Well, I was reaping there beyond the settlement. I was reaping barley, and there was this field of rye and there they killed twelve people. And as soon as they began to kill those people I lay down flat on my stomach and fell asleep. I didn't hear how they killed them, didn't hear a single squeal or shout.

And later on, when I got up, my house had already collapsed, and the neighbours', too. Everything is crackling, and the pigs are squealing, and all the cattle is squealing and bellowing there in the neighbours' yard. So I got up and am standing there, and my neighbour comes along and says: 'What are you standing there for? They've killed everyone in our village.'

"And I think: 'God, if only they'd killed me, too, why ever was I left!'"

The same thing happened to both men and women. And they themselves speak of it with surprise and even fear.

A child's nature recoiled from this reality even more quickly. In their case this unexpected, sudden slumber often saved them, in the literal, physical sense. Sleep hid children from their killers, and some it even saved.

"...Now the one who finishes people off is coming up on horseback. If he sees a person is alive, he finished him off. I opened my eyes a crack and cautiously looked at him."

QUESTION: "And the children?"

"The children aren't stirring, they're asleep. They fell asleep." (**Sofya Pimenovna Skirmand** from the village of Zbyshin, Kirovsk District.)

"...When there were only two houses left before ours — they came up, we saw them open the door and shoot once. One old woman was there. And they left the door open. And they were already at the last house before ours! That one, and then —

ours. There, you know, the headman lived. In that house. They were walking over there and he came out, and he had maybe twenty people in his house. He thought they'd ask something and go away. And his old lady came out, that man's, and his little girl — he, that headman, wasn't a bad person, they forced him to be headman. He didn't want to, but they made him. He was neither this nor that, neither fish nor fowl. Well, they grabbed him by the collar like this and shoved him in the door. And they grabbed the old lady and the child and began to shoot inside there with a tommy-gun. There was nowhere we could go, we were at a loss. I had a family of four. And there were five of the neighbours' children in my house, too. Where could we go? They wanted to hide right there, in the cellar, but I said: 'Run away, or else they'll come and either set us afire or kill us. Let's run, let them shoot at us and that's all.'

"So we made a dash for the graveyard, those children and us. We flung ourselves down in a pit that was there. Three of the children ran along the road apparently in the direction of Romanovka, and two lay low: the wind had broken the top off a pine, and they crawled into that top. And then they fell asleep there. And we were in that pit. We see Germans standing around the graveyard. There's no way we can climb out: they're walking around and shouting, you can hear them. Well, we don't climb out. Even after they've gone away, it seems to us they're standing there. The children are sleeping..." (**Ulyana Osipovna Kazak** from the village of Kazimirovka, Mozyr District.)

That's how people's systems saved them from madness (and at times children from death). It indicated that something was going on for which human nature was not "designed", not "programmed", in spite of all past experience mankind

had gained from the Tamerlanes and Genghis Khans of all ages and nations.

When people remember all this in such detail, you believe in their veracity. A woman sits in front of you with a troubled, questioning face ready for suffering, a look like that of a hospital patient before a serious operation. She's definitely not about to make anything up!...

Some people talk so readily that it seems as though they've been waiting for this moment for all these thirty years – to complain to someone from far away, to let the whole world know what they went through here.

Akulina Pankratovna Gabrus from the village of Kozulichi, Kirovsk District: "...Well, I had my two-year-old girl in my arms, right here. Yes, I had a paper with me, I'd taken my paper. Well, they herded us along, herded us together. I think: my God, where can my family be? I only had that one little girl in my arms. They herded us together. Some are saying they'll drive us away to be refugees, and others are saying they'll kill us, and who knows! I think: where should I go, my God? Then they herded people down the highway. And my neighbour walks along and says: 'Come on, Kulina, let's go, we'll go wherever the people go! God's will be done!'

"We'd got only as far the hulling mill, we're coming out from behind the house – and the Germans are carrying out the balance. And I say: 'Well, honey, God's will is already done as far as we're concerned.'

"We'd heard that they'd driven people into the mill and set them on fire in Lyutin. I says: 'Well, Yavginya, God's will is already done as far as we're concerned.'

"She says: 'Uh-huh, so it is.'

"Well, they surrounded them all around, stood

one next to the other – all around! You couldn't have stuck a finger between them – from the road to the road, all round that building. And the yard was full of people. And they're pushing them inside the doors, smothering them, driving them inside the doors, there into the hulling mill. And I was carrying my daughter in my arms, right here. And I had a paper. I looked and saw Mummy was already there, and Daddy. They were smothering those people so, beating them so bad! One of them there started to plead with them and they began to hit him with butts of their rifles. They pushed him in there on a bayonet point. It was a man. A young fellow, he was. And I was with that little girl. I looked back like this, and my mother is standing there.

"'Mummy,' I says, 'it's all over with us!'

"I kiss her and she is like ice. And my father – he was a little farther off. And already... And there was this woman, you know, two little girls and her. They went up to a German, begged him, and he let them go. That one over there, Ulyanikha. He let her through. Then I looked – my God, now it was my mother and me who had to go! And everything grew dark before my eyes, I don't see anything. I only see the shadow of the man who let those other three go. And I walked up and: 'Sir!' – crossed myself, and then my little daughter – I had the paper right here, I'd forgotten about it – my child pulled out the paper. Oh my God, why, I have a paper! I'd clean forgotten..."

They could kill a whole village for no reason at all, because they killed without investigating too thoroughly who was who, and whether he had an "Ausweis" or not. And suddenly a woman showed some paper, and it saved her and her child's life... a chance event which only serves to

emphasize the degree to which all the nazis' "reasons" and "proofs" were invented on the spot, not even very painstakingly.

QUESTION: "How old was your little girl?"
"Two years old."

QUESTION: "She took out the paper herself?"

"Well she – like this... I was holding her, I'd forgotten about it, everything was dark before my eyes, I can't see anything, just how the man's shadow is moving. I show it to him, and he goes: 'Mother, over there!'

"I ran over to the other side and fell down. I fell down with my little girl. Then I raised myself up. And more of them were coming – one column, another column. I thought: it's all the same, those let me go, these will kill me. But no. They didn't touch me. I had got only as far as the highway there, and a man is coming along it. He's carrying papers, he ran home and got that paper, and his wife is with him and two children. They're also carrying a bundle of clothes. I think: 'Lord, where are you going, people!' I think if I tell them – others had gone by and not told them – I think, if I tell them they'll kill me, too. They took them there and killed them..."

Killed them although this person also had a "paper". What is a paper when a "plan" is in action!

"...I looked back. Oh-oh, there's smoke already! All you could hear was the machine-gun: rat-tat-tat! As soon as they shoved them in there they immediately killed them. And then they set them on fire. A German was leading that guy that had the paper; if it weren't for the German I'd have told they were killing people.

"For three years, maybe, it didn't leave my sight, just stayed there and stayed there..."

Even today the memory of how they killed Kozulich and her relatives and neighbours does not "leave the sight" of Akulina Pankratovna.

We spoke with the other woman Akulina Pankratovna mentioned – **Ulyana Prokopovna Drozd**. She also saw with her own eyes the full horror of the massacre of the people of Kozulich.

"...Well, we're standing there... They threshed everyone outside, only the empty houses were left. My father and mother and two younger sisters.

"Ah yes, when they drove everyone away I stayed behind and covered the two pigs and two cows with straw. And the dog was on the chain. They came up: 'Aweg, aweg, aweg!'

"I got going and went to the highway. I come out onto it and see everyone standing in families! And crying. They're standing still and crying..."

"And they led us to where that graveyard is, there was a mill there, a hulling mill, the miller lived there. There was his old house and here – his new one. Well, they go in this way, say: 'Turn right!'

"We turn right. They had opened the mill's double door, and the mill balance is standing next to the door.

"Go in there and carry out the balance!"

"They're wearing German clothes, but talk our language, Russian: 'Go in there!'

"No one goes.

"Go in!"

"No one goes into that mill. They – they had these rubber lashes, this big huge belt over their

Ulyana Drozd tells her story





arm — and they brought that lash down over people's heads, right down on their backs! People were walking in file with their families, and the men sheltered their families like this. They let off beating people. They let off, opened up that hulling mill — well, the mill had a double door — a wide door in two parts with a bolt. They opened up those two halves of the door and said: 'Now then, go in there!'

"Well, some people go in, others don't. They themselves go in and call: 'Come on now,' they call, 'Come in, come in!'

"'Aweg, aweg!' go the Germans.

"And those are calling in Russian: 'Come in, come in!'

"And they pushed people in through those doors. Into that mill. And I, you know — this guy was standing there in German clothes — I says to him: 'Let me go,' and I had some kind of certificate. They had given them out in Lyubonichi. I says: 'Sir, let me go.'

"He looked at that ... piece of paper, took me by the arm and led me across the highway.

"'Sit down and stay here,' he says in Russian. 'Sit here until I come, don't run away anywhere. If you run off, they'll kill you.'

"Well, what will be will be. I sat down and stay sitting there. And my mother says: 'Here's a scarf and some bread, get yourself ready to be a refugee.'

"She had taken two pieces of salt pork along with her, two loaves of bread — this was for the three children and the two of us, we thought we were going to be driven away to be refugees. I waved my hand: 'I don't need it.'"

QUESTION: "And where was your mother?"

"Already in the hulling mill. She thought it might come in handy for me at least. For me at least."

QUESTION: "She handed it to you?"

"They didn't let me take it, didn't let me in to her, or her out to me. Well, I waved my hand: 'Mummy, I don't need it. There's enough for me at home,' I says."

QUESTION: "And who of your family was there with your mother?"

"The two younger girls, my sisters. Well, the Germans went after the people, got them into the mill and closed it with that bolt. And I'm sitting there, I'd lowered my legs into the ditch like this and I'm sitting there. Just like now on the bench. That same guy that led me across the highway passes by. And they're running, running about with jerricans, woosh-woosh-woosh, pouring the contents of the jerricans all over. And that same guy comes up to me: 'Get going – forward, march!'"

"'And walk along the highway,' he says, 'keeping off to the side, only don't run: they'll shoot, but,' he says, 'that won't be at you. That's what he said. Well, so I started off. I walk along – what will be will be! I walk along a ways, and this man is coming along there: they had let him go home to get these papers, and two children are with him. A German was leading them, those people, that man with his wife and family. And I walk on. I come to the highway leading here, and this sentry is standing there. And these people are there, and the trucks are roaring so, keep roaring so. My sister comes up (she's seventy two now): 'Where are Daddy and Mummy?'"

"And they had already set them on fire as I was walking away, the hulling mill already burning. I says: 'Over there, they're already burning!'"

"'A-a-ah!' the people raised this cry."

QUESTION: "All those people? That were left?"

"Uh-huh. I says: 'Be quiet, you!...'"

"One fellow runs up and says: 'Calm down, otherwise that will happen to you, too!'"

"They all fell quiet as mice! Fell silent. Konovalov comes running up, that same one as was in the red Saturday..."

QUESTION: "Did the partisans catch him, too, then?"

"They caught him and wounded him, but someone from Kozulichy hid him in an outhouse. And the next night they drove him into Kirovsk by horse."

QUESTION: "He was the head of the police?"

"The chief head, of, you know, the Kirovsk police, well, over there. He even commanded one of their detachments. Well, so he comes up: 'Well then – burn this side to coal, and that side you can leave standing!'"

QUESTION: "He was talking about the village?"

"Yes, about the village. Those Germans how they ran, and a breeze was blowing this way, how they ran around behind the sheds, around in back of the sheds – set every other one on fire, every other one. Everything is burning. 'As for you,' he says, 'scatter.' Everyone ran off then, and I ran, too."

QUESTION: "Were many people left?"

"Our village was big. They burnt three hundred and eighteen people, with their children, well, and the village was still big. I came running home and still had time to drive out the cow, I drove out the calf and two pigs. A pail was standing there, a bowl and seven or so spoons – I took it, picked it up and went out of the house. Otherwise everything in the house burnt up. Well, I went out, sat down in the street and just sit there. The Germans didn't touch me. They're driving along the highway – back and forth, back and forth all the time. Some people hid, but I sat there, I thought – you can only die once; if I already got out of there... Everything burnt up, the next day I came and couldn't bring myself to go into the yard."

"I looked, and my heart sank, believe me! Then I opened the cellar and saw those clothes: father's and mother's clothes are lying there... I, believe

me, I stood there in a stupor in that cellar. Well, so what? I survived... But as for forgetting — I couldn't forget. At the time I had a dream about that sister of mine, the youngest, she was such a curly-top! She was in the second form. And I say: 'Well, Alyona...'

"I know that she's burnt. And she says to me: 'Oh, Ulyana, my head hurt so, I hid my head under a log, the fire scorched it so!...'

"It was a dream I had. And she hid her head under a log. That's what she says to me in the dream..."

Fiery memories, fiery dreams...

Many people told us about their dreams, both during the war and after. Because their torments continued in their dreams. Again and again they lived through the same events in the most real way, together with those who perished and, in a way, in their stead.

People even had "collective" dreams after that common horror. Such dreams that after talking things over in the morning they suddenly ran out of the forest where they were hiding to their burnt-down homes and villages, so real were their dreams of the agonies of their relatives and friends...

We are in the village of Lozovaya, Osipovich District, Mogilyov Region. Several women working around the silo, after learning who we are and why we've come, are telling us, interrupting one another, about what happened then and, even more, about their present concerns, worries and troubles. The two are interwoven: man's life is one, and so is his memory. It's like a tree: before the sap rises from the roots to the very last, youngest twig, it has to pass through the whole trunk. And these women are still quite young and strong, and so today's problems are of more importance

to them than to those many people whom age has left "outside the mainstream". These are people full of practical worries and interests, and here they start telling us about — their dreams. Their so real dreams. Because reality itself then seemed a horrible dream, a nightmare. One flowed into the other, and it wasn't clear where one ended and the other began...

"...We were in the forest," says **Volga Grigoryevna Grishanovich**, "well, and we came out of the forest when they burnt our village. We had a look and gathered the ashes: children are lying there as if they're alive. You take hold of them — and the ashes scatter. In one house we gathered them all. Nine buckets — nothing but white bones. And in another — there was a real mountain in there. And you could see blood, they had apparently killed them. Because they're in a pile, and there was blood. They were lying in the corners, under the stove. A year later one old man... He had a dream about his wife. 'Why don't you bury me?' she says in the dream. 'I'm lying there under the stove, it's deadly stuffy!' Well, he didn't tell anyone, it's raining, and he's quietly taking apart that stove. We come up and say: 'Grandpa, what are you doing?'

"I had a dream about Alesya," he says. "'Why don't you bury me, I've been lying under that stove for a whole year already, it's deadly stuffy, and you don't bury me.'"

"He really did take that stove to pieces, and there he found bones, only the bones were left."

QUESTION: "What was the name of that old man?"

"Victor Prokopovich. And his wife was called Alesya. Well, we gathered up those bones and buried them in the earth again. And when we had

buried them we went into the forest, and we'd cried our eyes out in the forest and then we'd come running back to the site of the fire — we'd dreamt they were saying: 'Why didn't you bury us!...' We'd start taking apart the brickwork... How many times we came running. We dig around and dig around, find the bones and set the grave straight again. We'd go into the woods again, lie down to sleep: what kind of sleep could we have there! Again we have a dream about them: 'You didn't...' That we didn't bury everyone. We go there again and start taking apart those bricks, looking... Well, so we were left alive. But how they burnt them no one knows. Not a soul in our village got away. Over in the neighbouring village, in Bozka, there they took people to Germany. But in our village there were these young women — they didn't leave a soul. There those that were with children they burnt, and the young ones they sent to Germany."

QUESTION: "And later the Germans set up a garrison here?"

"That was later on. But when they burnt the village, we hid in the swamp. We sat there for three days and nights. We'd climb up onto a pine, have a look: no one is stoking their stoves, no one is carrying water. Well, we decided that they'd taken them away maybe and driven them into a garrison. Then — the sun was setting — we said: 'Let's run and have a look at what's going on...'"

QUESTION: "How many people perished here?"

"One hundred and fifty from our village alone. And they say they drove thirty people here from Lochin. And those that they caught in the woods they also threw into the fire.

"Well, that's how it is, we were left to this day. Out of the whole village we were left: the three of us here — she and her children, and one other

woman and her children were left — three families..."

...You have to change the tape, stop the story — and you're afraid to: will the teller be able, will he have the strength to go back *there* again... For there were times when after such a break the narrator could no longer give the same full, detailed account as before. But more often you had the feeling that he had merely temporarily stopped "his tape" along with you, that it was actually all "taped" inside him, once and for all, the one story of his life, a story that would only disappear together with the person and his memory. You really see, when you hear as many of these people as we did, that this unusual fullness and exactitude is a general characteristic of memories that have been through fire. *Such* things a person cannot spill and lose on life's path, even after three decades, even if he'd like to...

But this general memory manifests itself in different ways, depending on the individual. What the person is like determines the way he tells his story.

Among them all we will for the time being single out two types, two kinds of tellers. We are referring mainly to the women narrators, because the women's accounts are the fullest, the most emotional.

We have already mentioned one type of narrator — those who both speak and look, and even grin at you in a somehow strangely calm fashion, lending their tale an unexpectedly "epic" quality. Until you get used to it and understand what is hidden, what is suppressed behind it, the effect is rather frightening. The inappropriately sing-song voice of a Barbara Slesarchuk (Ivatsevichskiye Bobrovichi) or the resounding, dispassionate tones of a Yeva Tumakova (Bykhovskaya Kras-

nitsa) at first prevents you from even feeling or understanding what the person is telling about. On the other hand, when at last the truth behind this calmness and dispassion and strange grin hits you, the truth of the event itself, the very fact, becomes even more unbearable and horrible.

"..I cross the street," says Yeva Tumakova from Krasnitsa, and the eyes in her broad face express a question, a kind of incomprehension: what was this, did it truly happen? "and see one of my relatives lying there, he was born in nineteen twenty-three, and he's lying there, and his guts are showing... Well, everything, his stomach was all torn up and everything... He says: 'Yeva, give me some water.'

"I say: 'Oh my, Ignat, where will I find water for you, everything's burnt!'

"'Are you all alive?'

"'They killed my mother, but my brother and father were left alive... And your family?'

"'They killed Nadya,' he says, 'but Kastyan crawled into the ravine somewhere...'"

Some kind of split is occurring inside the narrator: she herself is telling the story, but at the same time seems to be asking: did this happen to her, is it true, could it have happened? And if it's true, what is this, and how is it possible that such a thing could have happened?...

And this split is evident not only in the teller's face, in her eyes, in her intonation, in her sonorous, dispassionate voice, but also in the very words she uses. Even her words, and not just her intonation, now seem "wrong", "inappropriate". Everything is burning, people are being tortured

and killed, one can imagine the horror of it all, the screaming in the street, and the teller says not that she ran, not that she crept, not that she dashed into the field, but that she "went" ("we went and sat down in the field"). Or take that "chat" between thirteen-year-old Yeva Tumakova and her gravely wounded relative. "Oh my, Ignat, where will I find water for you!..." – it really seems as if this is an ordinary conversation between a guy and a gal in the middle of a village street on an ordinary, and not *that* awful day.

Along with this type of narrator and their accounts there comes to mind, among many others, a quite different kind. In the same club in the village of Krasnitsa we also taped **Nina Mikhailovna Knyazeva**.

An attractive, still quite young woman comes up to the table, sits down and begins to speak softly, almost in a whisper. No, it is not out of awkwardness or bashfulness in front of her neighbours who are sitting along the wall, or us, strangers, that she has lowered her voice, but because each word is a source of pain and suffering to her. Not back in the past, but here and now.

Life for her is not split into two halves, for what happened, what is fixed in her memory, continues to this day. Such is her character, such is her mentality. And it all continues on inside her with such actual poignancy that any failure or hurt in her life (her husband left her, and she told us about that, too) strikes the same inflamed spot. This kind of person feels everything, even trifles, three times as strongly as anyone else... And if you look closely at the bullet-scarred face you will find so much gentleness in those eyes, those childish lips, so much kindness, so much human beauty.

Each word of her story seems to reach down to



Nina Knyazeva

"...A new breed of people will emerge, real rulers by nature."

Hitler, 1941



that same old burning, living pain – and she involuntarily lowers her voice to a whisper, as though she were trying to suppress that hurt inside her. At times her voice gives way completely – to soft, soundless crying... In this quiet womanly beauty, this quiet voice, these quiet tears one seems to hear incredible screaming.

“...Well, what do I know. I only know how they drove people into our house. When they were killing Krasnitsa, we were standing in the street. We lived over that way, toward the low part – in the settlement. We were standing in a group and saw there was already smoke over here. And we waited for the next house, for the neighbours... And he comes up to us: ‘Into the house!’

“They drove us into the house. We were three families. Our family – seven people...”

QUESTION: “You stood and saw them killing the neighbours?”

“Well, they were finished, the neighbours were already ... they’re breaking the windows and throwing grenades... And we were still standing next to our house. Mummy, Daddy and I. Father was sick, he’d just come back from having an operation. They didn’t send him to war. Well, we were standing there, stood there until he comes: ‘Into the house!’

“They drove us in. Well, we went into the house – what could we do? We all began to hide one behind the other. Mummy is scurrying around, and everyone is following right behind her – nobody’s getting anywhere. Well, they just stood there.

“Well, are we going to have to fuss around with you for a long time? Lie down! Only face downwards. Lie down!”

“Well, we scattered every which way! Mummy wanted to get under the stove – but Father shouted: ‘You’ll burn alive!’

“She immediately jumped onto the stove. Well, we did, too – hopped up after her onto the stove. Seven of us. Well, our granny was there, too. She crawled up onto the stove and screened us all, she lay down on the edge. Well, they started to kill us: first those who were lying on the floor. Father was on the floor, grandfather, my brother, a woman with a little baby had crawled under the bed there. They killed all those. I keep watching how they go on killing them. I see everything. Well, then I was also – that’s when I was wounded – I was hit right away here in the face, in one cheek and here, out through the other it went.”

QUESTION: “And you saw the person who did the shooting?”

“I kept watching while they were killing them on the floor. Then – it was my turn! Well, then I was hit, and I lay down flat. And my brother, the one that was younger than me – he was leaning there against the chimney – he wasn’t wounded. And Mother jumped onto the stove first, and she lay down like this, with her head behind the chimney. And she – when they were shooting, the flesh flew – her head got spattered with it. Well, they kept on shooting at the stove. They riddled that old woman with bullets – and she was still alive. They wounded my mother, killed everyone there... There were seven of us, and only the three of us – Mummy and me and my brother – got off the stove afterwards. Well, they’d been in there about three times already – they’d shoot and go out, and listen whether somebody might not be alive. They’d hear something, come in and shoot again. Each time there were clouds of smoke! They went out for the third time, came in again – listened: well, that’s it,

nobody's breathing! Those who were still alive held their breath."

QUESTION: "And did they say anything when they came in?"

"They themselves talked softly, they were listening whether anyone was breathing. Well, they went out for the last time, say we're 'kaput', but we can hear them. We just lie there, holding our breath. Well? They can't hear anything. They set the house on fire. There was some hay or something here in the attic — it began to catch on fire. Mummy gets up. There are dead people lying on her. She jerk-jerked away with her legs! — she felt she'd been hit in the leg — and began to break free.

"Well, I'll try once more — if I get out we'll go, otherwise we'll burn."

"And we say: 'Mummy, we'd rather burn!'

"And we immediately began to take everything off, our clothes. She didn't let us get undressed, says: 'No, wait, maybe we'll get out.'

"Well, we began to crawl out. Well, we got out. Mummy took a few steps: 'Whoever's alive — follow me.'

"Well, my brother and I together. Children we were. I was nine, and my brother was eight or so. Well, we got out. She says: 'Whoever's alive, follow me!'

"We got out and see that Father's come out. Wounded. His right arm and right here, in the neck, they wounded him. Well, we crawled out. We had a field of rye — we crawled through the field. Mummy had already begun to lose consciousness: started running away from us. And we find her by her blood... (*She cries.*)

"I can't tell it..."

"She still wanted to live. And she was losing

consciousness. The houses are burning, the sun is setting... One house was left in a little stand of woods — well, everyone who was alive sneaked to that house. And Mummy says: 'Go, maybe you can find some kind of cart and pull me in it.'

"My younger brother went off — well, he was just a child — went to that house, and sat down there. I went. I couldn't see a thing: I was wounded in the face, see. There was no carriage there. Mummy wanted to burn to death — she crawled up to the fire, and someone dragged her away from there. She scraped up her knees crawling. And Yakov Bikasov (he's still alive now) was walking by — he carried her, took her all the way to the road. That would be a kilometre from that house. And then another man carried her the rest of the way, well, and we gathered in that house. All were wounded.

"Those who had relatives — they fetched their relations. But Mummy's sisters were far away: by the time they heard... We wandered around the woods. Later on we found a cart: they ran off into the woods — and we took her in the carriage. And Father was gravely wounded, he stayed by himself in that house. Well, they said that the Germans were coming, in tanks through the woods — there's nowhere to go. People are running — every man for himself, into the swamp... Well, we all left, and he... He killed his own self... We had a new thing to cry about... We were left. Mummy was wounded, but she even had a baby girl after that. There was no time to sit still, and I said: 'Mummy, let's go to Vorovskoye. I remember the way.'

"I'd gone there once at night and remembered it. I took them to Vorovskoye. I had just brought them there, and on that morning the Germans came to Vorovskoye. Well, they drove us out.

Drove us off to be refugees, drove us along, but we ran away. Beyond Kuzkovichi, into the woods. We ran away. We lived there for a week or something. We dug up a trench. Well, the Germans caught us in the woods all the same. And chased us out. We lived in Yamnoye — beyond Bykhov. And then in Podklenye, and then — in

dug-outs. In the winter, too. Until the war ended...”

The woman's voice grows softer and softer, and her pain cries out louder and louder...

The Thirtieth

"Konashi is a village in Gorodok District, Vitebsk Region, on the shore of Lake Plav. Is the seat of the village Soviet and the centre of the Rodina Collective Farm. 100 inhabitants, 34 households. El. school, club, lib., store. In effect forms a single inhabited locality with the villages of Malgati (43 inhabs., 18 hhs.) and Gorodok (67 inhabs., 19 hhs.).

"In the Gr. Patriotic War the 1st partisan brigade (under the command of M. F. Shmyrev) was based near K. During a punitive operation on 1/5 1942 Ger. fascists shot 30 inhabitants in the vill. of Gorodok and burned 69 people alive in the vill. of Malgati...

V.I. Shchemelev."

We made it to Konashi late in the morning of June 14, 1972. The fifth volume of the Byelorussian Soviet Encyclopedia, where we found the above information on the village, was then still in the press, and we had heard about Konashi for the first time that same day in the district Soviet's executive committee. All we knew was that among those who were shot by the members of the punitive expedition only one person was left alive, the present chairman of the village Soviet V.I. Shchemelev.

The terse entry, which, as we now know, was written for the encyclopedia by this very man, does not say that among the thirty people who were shot the thirtieth was he himself, Vasil Ivanovich.

It is eighty kilometres from Vitebsk to Konashi through the district centre. But it is no exaggeration to say "we made it" there, because the last few kilometres are on a low-lying rural road that cuts through woods and fields and that was horribly swampy after several days of over-abundant rains.

It was on this road that we met the man we

were looking for. He was driving somewhere on a motorbike...

We sat in his radiantly tranquil office, once again flooded with sun after the rain. The quiet became even more apparent when from time to time it was broken by the distant drone of some motor on the ground, or, more rarely, in the sky. We couldn't even hear the singing of the nightingales from the alders; it had greeted us here, too, seemingly one and the same everywhere. All this was now outside the closed windows, where the ancient pines stood dazed in the steamy heat and an alder grove ran wild around a small bog. An invisible wasp buzzed distractedly somewhere in our radiant quiet and the tape-recorder hummed on the table as Vasil Ivanovich, a staid dark-haired man, told his story.

"...Early in the morning of the first of May they surrounded our village from this side and from the way you came. The only way out that was open was the lake. There were more households then: now there are seventy-one with the people from Malgati, but then there were about a hundred. And some partisans stayed to spend the night in our village. They held a meeting on the thirtieth, and at night they moved off... The Germans were left free access here. They gathered all the people where I met you, where the collective farm yard is now. Well, and then they began to shoot people there. The families of partisans, people that were connected with the partisans. They drew people up in two files and started ... with the machine-guns..."

QUESTION: "And where were you then?"

"We were standing near the fence. Everything happened in front of my eyes. They just led them off ways from us and shot them. And then they took one more man and shot him. And my turn

came. Well, I was still only thirteen then. This woman comes up, that was connected with the Germans, and points to me:

“‘That one has connections with the partisans.’

“He takes me by the collar and shoves me over there, where the dead were lying. This German, an interpreter actually, but wearing a German uniform. He pushed me and there was a burst of machine-gun fire at me from behind. I fell.

“At first, of course, I didn’t know whether I was dead or alive, until I came to my senses a bit. All three bullets hit me right here, in the small of my back. I felt everything seemed to be all right, it didn’t hurt, I was still alive. And then I felt it begin. I couldn’t even feel my legs. I lay like that for a bit and a German comes up from behind. He walked up, walked all around me, bent down – I can hear him breathing heavily over me. Apparently he was listening whether I was alive or not. He listened, and I, of course, expected he’d hear I was alive and kill me. But he, apparently, reckoned I was already killed, and went on farther. They gave the order to dig a pit.”

QUESTION: “Did you hear what they said there?”

“Right next to where we were lying, that’s where they dug the pit for us. Of course they made our men dig. The young ones were all with the partisans or in the army. Only the old ones were home, those who weren’t fit to serve anymore. Well, I hear that any moment they’ll start piling us into the pit. I think: it’s our people who’ll lay us in the pit, I’ll ask them to at least put me on top. And to strew only a small amount of earth over me...”

“And then a flare was fired. It turns out that someone shot at them in Malgati. They just left us for dead, gave the old men the order to bury us, and themselves headed for Malgati. And there they burnt everyone to the last man. Some they

killed in their apartments, others they burnt alive.

“And then I hear the women have already begun to cry and shriek. I think: there’s something strange here, probably they, the Germans, aren’t here anymore. I lie there and at first I think that maybe they won’t bury me after all. If I have a chance I’ll ask them to carry me into the woods, if that will be possible. Everyone’s shrieking and crying... And then I ventured to turn my head a little. Over that way, where all those people were lying killed. They were lying like this, and I was like this, across them, and over behind me one more boy I used to go to school with, was lying at my feet, he was killed. His pa was with the partisans. And here I see our neighbours come running. I ask one of them: ‘Tell my Mummy to bring me something to drink.’

“She didn’t listen to me: they had killed her pa then, and she ran straight there. Then another neighbour came running. That one did listen to me, she ran and told my mother. They brought me something to drink, and I says: ‘Carry me off somewhere quick. There aren’t any Germans, they went to Malgati.’”

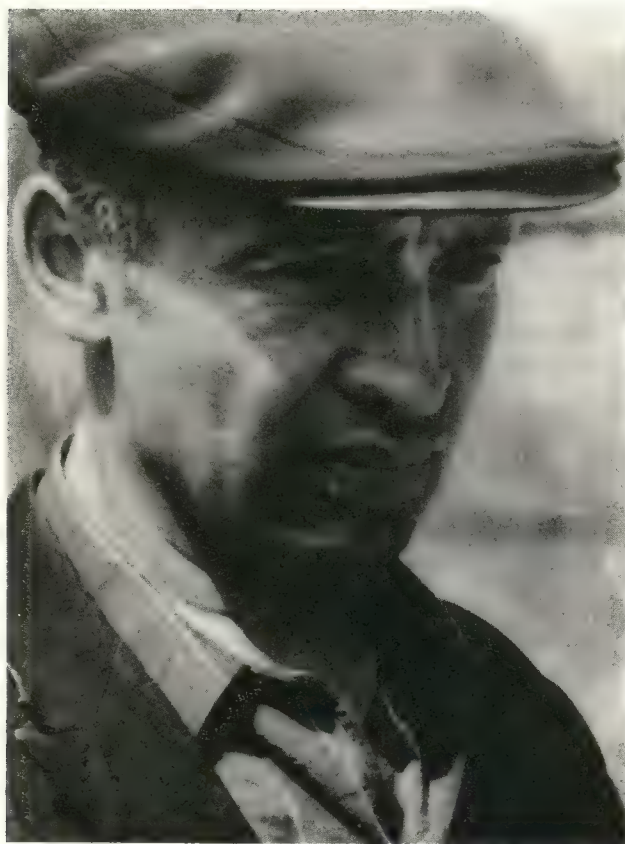
QUESTION: “And your mother was home?”

“Nope, everyone was standing there, and they were surrounded by machine-guns. And there the Germans picked those they needed for themselves. So nobody would run off. And they picked those they needed.”

QUESTION: “Did your mother see all that?”

“No, she didn’t. My mother was standing on that side of the shed, and we were on this side. I saw them all being killed, they killed them in the vegetable garden in front of the window, see.

“Well, she took me... I was already quite big, and my mother was old, close on sixty she was – well, she began to carry me... And I had a first cousin. He helped her. They carry me. I was quite big already. There weren’t any carts then, or they



Vasil Shchemelev, chairman of the Konashi village Soviet

might at least have taken me in some wheelbarrow.

"And all of a sudden they say the Germans have come back. And I call out then: 'Put me somewhere!...'

"Well, where could they put me? All around were fields, the village. And they took me to the hayloft and hid me under the hay. And one more lad was lying there somewhere on top hiding... I heard them talking there: 'They're burning the village.' They're talking on top. 'They'll come,' I thought, 'and set the loft on fire, and I'll burn up.' I says to my mother: 'You may as well carry me back, to that same place...'

"And then they gave an order and they, the Germans, left.

"Then they carried me into the woods. My mother, my cousin, and also my older sister. She had little children, and she had to carry the children. There were three children. And help carry me. So they carried me and put me in the bathhouse. We had a bathhouse in the woods. And they themselves went off to where the Germans had killed everyone. My mother's mother was killed, then her uncle and his five children, her sister and her husband, her other sister and her niece. They killed many of our kin. Everyone went there where the bodies were. Then later on, when everything quieted down, they each began to bury their relatives. And I was left there, alone in that bathhouse.

"Then I began to feel bad. The next day they came and found me – I was lying on the floor. There weren't any doctors. My blood ran and ran, as much as there was of it... They only changed my bandages and that's all. People spent most of the time in the woods. They spent the night in the woods, and after dinnertime went home. Because an expedition was going on, the Germans attacked more often in the morning. After dinner they

didn't go anywhere. The partisans managed to get medicine."

QUESTION: "And who was that woman who pointed you out?"

"She isn't alive anymore, they shot her. She lived here in our village, she thought something, I guess, she was inclined that way. Later she was shot by the Germans — because she had pointed out the sister of one of the policemen. They killed her the same day as everyone else, but her last: the policemen insisted on it..."

When Vasil Ivanovich's mother carried her barely living teenage son to safety, she was, according to him, nearly sixty. It didn't even occur to us that she might still be alive, and so we didn't ask. Vasil Ivanovich himself told us that she was alive and well and lived in her own house, next to his. Of course, we asked to meet her.

Domna Vasilyevna was eighty seven, and may we all be as well as she at that age. We found her in her son's orchard, next to the hives in the shade, which, however, offered scant relief from the noonday heat.

"I'm watching the bees," the old woman said. "Nobody's home. The mosquitoes are eating me alive here."

No swarm could have got away with this amazingly lively and talkative old lady on guard. Vasil Ivanovich stayed in the orchard, and she led us to her house, which is a little ways off from her son's.

"I'll tell you everything, my lads, everything in detail."

And tell us she did, now sitting down for a moment, now getting up, gesturing, changing her voice to imitate someone else's, now raising it, now dropping it almost to a whisper when she once again felt bitter and afraid, as she had *then*.

"...There was a meeting the day before, before May Day, the partisans held it. Danila Raitsev's detachment. They held the meeting, the partisans left and only our people remained.

"It was barely light the next day... I'd always go out and listen where there was banging, where there was shooting... I went outside and I think to myself: 'Lord, what's that, that's shining in front of our village?' I had a better look, and saw it was Germans in their helmets, and they had light-coloured clothing on. They'd run a ways and fall flat, run ways and fall flat... After a while they noticed me and began to fire. I went back into the house.

"'Hey, children,' I says, 'the Germans have come!'"

"And my old man shouts: 'You think everything's Germans! Sit tight, now you're sitting here. You think everything's Germans.'"

"And I'm yelling: 'Hurry up, Germans!'"

"And they came down the hill and began to fire from over there — right at our house... I had a family, you know: my old man, me, three boys, one daughter was already married.

"'Lie down on the floor near the stove!'"

"And we all lay down. Lay there. And they just fired away at the house, fired away — they pierced everything with bullets, even the stove... They fired from two sides with a machine-gun. And then they see that there isn't anyone, that no one's running out, no one's running, and they come right in to us in the house. Then we still lived where the school is, where the lime-trees are.

"'Mother, parisan, parisan!...'"

"And I joined my hands, I stand like this and say: 'There aren't any partisans.'"

"They crawl up to the attic, everywhere, under the floor — they crawl around looking everywhere. And what's there to look for when the house is full of smoke.



““Get out, get out!”

“They drove us out onto the road and made us stand there. They surrounded us all round, all round. Drove us forward. They hit my old man in the back with a butt, in the back with a butt... True, they didn’t beat me then – I won’t tell a lie. But they beat my old man... Just as we came up there, to the hill, where the store was, I see a woman running and screaming: ‘Oh, my good people, oh, my dear sirs, oh, what have you done, oh, you’ve killed my dear daughter!...’

“Here one of them ran up and shot her on the spot, and she’s lying there...”

“And they’re leading people and more people along, and beating them outright. Some they bring from the lake. People hid in the lake then.

“I see: oh, Lord, my old man is harnessing up the horse! My old man harnessed up the horse, they put a machine-gun in his wagon, and then

they tied him to the cart himself by the hand. And drove it forward. Then I see they’re driving cows, herding them out of there, taking more and more of them away...

“Then they began to fire off flares. They set off some flares, left off shooting already. And ran off. And over there, in Malgati, they set the place on fire. And the people, some of the people they burnt alive, others they killed – made away with them all, made away with the whole village.”

QUESTION: “Did they draw you all up in line? Your son said so. And lead the men away from you?”

“They drew everyone up, everyone. Led the sons off, drew them up near another building. And I sat down like this. (*The old woman demonstrates by sitting down on the floor with ease.*) I put one little grandson here, and the other, the younger one, I laid here. And I’m sitting there.



Domna Shchemeleva
Monument to the Twenty-Nine

And they gave us an order: 'If you don't let us know in Smolovka when the partisans come, we'll do away with everyone.' Well, who's going to say anything?... I saw how my mother, my own mother, and my sister-in-law and her three children... And she was expecting, in her last week already. And my mother. She was standing in the road... One polizei, from Zaguzye, pats her on the shoulder, my sister-in-law: 'Proska, tell us, where's your Evkhim?'

'He's been called up in the second mobilization, wasn't home. One brother was with the partisans, the younger, and he, the elder, Evkhim, had gone. And she was the wife of the elder one. My brother, not my son. I thought he wouldn't do anything to her — after all he was one of us, from Zaguzye. But he went and killed them all the same. The old lady, she was already seventy, and her daughter-in-law... And what had they done

wrong?...

"I myself can't budge from my seat, nohow. We're sitting next to the wall, and they're on the road.

"Then those who were left alive ran over, but I can't budge from my seat. I see full well that my folks are lying there. And this woman comes running up to me: 'Domna dear, your Vasil is alive! He's asking for a drink.'

"And I say: 'But is my Mum alive?... (*She cries.*) And what should I do?'

"And I can't get up. I have some matches: I wanted to light the stove, and I've been holding them in my hand the whole time ever since. And I crawled along some and crawled along some, and my tears just flowed... (*The old woman lies down on the floor with amazing ease and shows how she crawled.*) I crawled up, and he lifts himself up, lifted his head. And blood was coming out of his

ears, blood was coming out of his nose, blood was coming out of his mouth, and everything. So there.

"Ma-a... Ma-a... Take me away from he-ere... The Germans will finish me off..."

"But, sonny dear, wherever will I take you?..."

"But two girls were there, they lifted him up and carried him off into the shed. And covered him with straw. And he's shouting: 'But they'll finish me off here! They'll burn the shed, and burn me, too, in here! Take me away!...'"

"Well, we took him away from there. They put him right here, on my back, on my shoulders, and I walk along like this... And he's shouting: 'Mummy, carry me into the swamp! The Germans will finish me off!...'"

"I carried and carried him, and I got bent like this. (*She shows how.*) Believe it or not – all through the war I went around like that. I had a stick, and all through the war I went around bent over. And only later, after the war, I straightened out, now, as you see, I'm not that way anymore.

"Well, so I carried him into the woods and laid him down. And went off. Laid him down and went off. I walked like that – am I in my right mind or not?..."

"He's shouting again: 'The wolves will devour me here, Mummy! Take me away!...'"

"Then we put him in the bathhouse. I cut open his clothes on him, cut open his pants, cut open his boots. Well, he was all this blood... Under him... He, when they shot him, lay in the potato field, in a furrow, he tumbled into it face down, but then that's how he was left alive. Well, so the blood had clotted on him here – this whole big pancake... I flicked off that pancake, left him naked and went off again. I went off again, all bent over, to where they had shot them.

"I get there – what's this? – my mother's

lying there...

"'Mummy,' I says, 'what are you lying there for?'"

"She's lying there. I turned away – and Proska is lying there, too, farther on, my sister-in-law.

"'And what are you here for?'"

"They're lying there. Aha, they're already lying in the next world.

"My mother lay down... Her older granddaughter was there, and she laid that granddaughter down like this. (*She lies down on the floor and shows how.*) She lay down on top of her right like this. And the second one she drew up over here. And the third – here, right up to her. Like this. Well, she was still a bit alive... That little girl died only later...

"The old men were digging a pit there. They made them dig pits, big ones like this. Two big square pits like this. Twenty-nine people – they had to be put somewhere. Mine, see, was the thirtieth. And he was left alive. And those they... Some they laid sideways, some any which way, some – my God!..."

"Well, my mother asked the men: 'You men, tell the Germans to go ahead and finish me off. I feel awful bad...'"

"And he came up and fired at her, and the explosive bullet just burst out like this..."

"And another woman was walking along the road. She was walking along the road carrying one child in her arms, and another was running beside her, and a third. I look and she's lying on the road, like a hill, and the little kids next to her... (*For some reason the old woman begins to whisper.*) Lying there... And that other one, that went along with my Vasil, well, he was killed, too. He was younger than my son, and mine was taller, he himself said later on, when he came round, that the other lad ran after him, after my Vasil, and kept begging: 'Dear sirs, shoot me with my Mum!'"

"She's lying on the road with those two other children, and he keeps turning toward them and shrieking so, and shrieking so, and they shot him in the mouth..."

"But when he shot mine, well I guess his hand aimed lower..."

It's hard enough listening to such things. What is it like to carry them in one's memory — for so many years? These living memories that recede into the background at times, only to return to the fore again later...

Back in the shade in her son's orchard, where the worker-bees were cheerily humming as they prepared to swarm, Domna Vasilyevna asked, in a horror-filled whisper: "And should I tell about that, Vasil? About those boots with the legs?"

"Tell everything, Mummy. So people'll know everything."

And she told how once in the midst of the hard winter of 1941-1942 a whole lot of Germans and polzeis came into their village. A few of them entered the house. And then one of them flung a pair of legs shod in boots onto the floor. Women's legs. In women's boxcalf boots. Cut off at the knees and frozen. And that German said in Russian to Anka, Domna Vasilyevna's younger daughter, who was then a student but wasn't studying because of the war: "Look, my pretty, we took this from your aunt, the bandit!"

Domna Vasilyevna's sister, true enough, was with the partisans then.

Three days later, in Vitebsk, we called on Ganna Ivanovna Ignatenko, that same Anka, Domna Vasilyevna's younger daughter. The pleasant; intelligent woman, who served as a courier for the partisans in the war and now works in a kindergarten, gave us a more detailed account of

that horrid incident. Those were the legs of the partisan Polubinskaya. They were chopped off after she was already dead. Finding herself surrounded, she had put up a desperate defence, saving her last round for herself.

"My God, how much woe there was then, how much woe!" While saying this, Domna Vasilyevna knew that other people, other families, had fared even worse than they, the Shchemelevs. Her old man, who had been tied to the cart so he wouldn't run away, had nevertheless escaped from the Smolovka garrison. He survived the war and died a natural death in his house. Both her daughters are alive, Anka and her older sister Alexandrina, and living with their children in Vitebsk. And with her is her youngest, Vasil, whom she nursed twice, first when he was a baby and again when he was wounded. Her son is alive, and lives well, and good people respect him, and his house is as bustling and merry as a hive, with five daughters! Three of them are already living on their own, but with the start of the summer, following an honoured tradition, everyone comes to visit the old woman at once — children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

"I have nine great-grandchildren," the old lady said proudly. "And as for grandchildren!..." She waved her hand, there were so many.

While we were sitting inside the old woman's house recording her story, Vasil Ivanovich did not simply stand guard over his bees. Together with our driver he busied himself near one of the hives, and when later on we were invited into his house, on the table was some fresh honey in combs and cold milk from the cellar. There was also rye bread, steaming boiled potatoes, cold beet soup, butter and farmer's cheese. Like a good spirit, the young-looking mistress of the house had, unnoticed by us, come home from the field and prepared this spread. The two youngest of her five

daughters, who still live with their parents, were at school.

There was also something more important than graciously served, farm-fresh food in this cosy, radiant Byelorussian house — there was the peace that was so longed-for and so dearly bought; the air was imbued not merely with hospitality, but also with wise human sincerity, which, naturally, nobody talked about but which one felt in the depth of one's heart.

Grandma Domna resumed her post near the bees. The mistress of the house, too, who had just come from work, went back to it after feeding her guests. And her husband was supposed to have gone somewhere, too, but he stayed on with us to help us in our task.

We shall conclude with a few more words about him, his own sparse and modest words:

“...In the summer of forty three, they caught us in the field and gathered us in the village again.

And then one of the policemen again gave away the partisan families. That time they picked up twelve of us Shchemelevs. My cousin and I, my mother and father, my sister and her three children, and my aunt. And there was one more aunt, also with three children. And they took us into Gorodok and put us in prison. Those who were young, my sister and aunt, they sent off to a concentration camp, and us, the old people and children, they sent to the police garrison. And we lived there until the winter of forty three, until the Red Army freed us.

“And after that we went back and began to live. I was fifteen then, but there wasn't anybody, so they made me team leader. And there were twelve able-bodied women. There were none of those horses left or anything else. That's how we put the collective farm back on its feet...”

Curt and dry, almost like the excerpt with which we began this chapter about the Thirtieth.

Childless

by David Shields

Illustrated by David Shields

Published by David Shields

Copyright © 2004 David Shields

All rights reserved.

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN 0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

0-971-00000-0

In the wooded eastern part of Slutsk District, Minsk Region, there are two small villages with the same name, Adamovo, located not far apart. This time we were accompanied on our quest by a local guide and we didn't go astray here, having the exact addresses of the people we needed. We drove to the second Adamovo twice, after not finding one person home the first time. Then in the first Adamovo we were told about "one other woman", whom our young guide did not know; as luck would have it she lived in the second Adamovo, and so we drove there for the third time.

While we were circling back and forth between the two villages along country roads, an old woman was raking, and then stooking hay in a little meadow at the edge of the second Adamovo. The sun was already setting and she was in a hurry. The third time we drove into the village along that same road, we asked the woman where **Maria Tarasovna Khotka** lived. And a very simple miracle occurred: she was the very person we needed; though so close, we might have missed seeing and hearing her, for we couldn't have imagined, driving past her, that in this soul lay one more piece of the people's tragedy we were recording.

When we told Maria Tarasovna what we needed, she leaned her rake against the unfinished next-to-last stook and led us into her house.

We sat down at the table.

"...I, my dears, am a wee bit hard of hearing... I'll tell you how it was.

"I had two little girls, one was two-and-a-half years old, the other, one-and-a-half. And my sister lived right there, across the road. She also had a daughter, who already went to school. And she was making my little girl some wool stockings. She came to measure the stocking on my daughter

and says: 'Oh, uncle,' to my husband, 'the Germans are making a bridge over the Sluch, they're crossing over here.'

"I says: 'Really?'

"And she goes: 'Really and truly! They said so in the other village.'

"Well, so the little girl measured the stocking and left. I say to my husband — he was called Misha — to my man: 'Misha, how about us going away somewhere out of the house?'

"Well, there're bushes right nearby, see...

"And, my dears, after just as short a time as we've been talking together now, there's a shot. People, some on horseback, from that other Adamovo, from the first one, are already flying this way. There's a shot from the gravel road. One man fell down then... He just fell down, they didn't kill him... Oh, the bullets are whistling... They broke the glass in my window. A bullet broke it. It's all over now — the Germans are here. They surrounded us.

"But my man still managed to crawl out of the village into the woods. Well then.

"My sister comes and says: 'You know what, Maria,' this to me, 'let your children be over there with my little ones.' She had a boy there and that girl that, like I said, had brought the stocking to measure. 'They might as well,' she says, 'be over there.'

"'They might as well,' I says.

"She took those children to her house, and there they... They didn't burn up at home, they slaughtered them there afterwards, at my sister's...

"Oh! I go out of my house into the yard. I think: I'll go out now and have a look at what people are doing, where, where they're going... It's already burning! From that end, from there, from the marsh — everything's burning! Only that house, my sister's, and mine were left whole.

I start out for my sister's. I see a German and a policeman coming. They're coming into my yard. The German in front, and the policeman is walking behind. And I'm walking along the cattle-path.

"When I met up with him, he hit me, first with one hand, then with the other. So I flopped down under the fence and lie there... They went into the house. We had a new house-frame up, but the house I lived in was a small, temporary shack. And we had already got the timber then and built a new log cabin, it was already roofed... They went to set that house on fire, and I then made a dash for the cellar. There was this cellar dug in the earth and covered with rough boards. There were potatoes there and everything... And I crawled in among those potatoes, against the back wall, and sat there. Well.

"I hear a shot, my neighbour crying... Well, that's it — no more children. Neither mine nor my sister's. My sister was home. She also had two children...

"They set the whole village on fire, and it had already burnt down. And they came to check. We had a long pigsty here, maybe fifty metres long. The collective farm's pigs were in there. Well, they set fire to that pigsty last, surrounded it all around, stood there, they thought maybe someone would come out of there... Well, who could have, if everybody was home and they burnt everyone, killed everyone!...

"They came, they did, to check my yard, too. They ger-gerred something... What do I understand? They opened that cellar. And there were still some sheaves of hemp in that new house, so they kindled that hemp, poured something over it, and there was this little shelter over the cellar, this small shelter, so the doors wouldn't get snowed up — they kindled it and tossed it in there where I was. Oh, oh, my dears! — how the smoke

poured in, and the cellar is burning!... The wall was wooden after all. The boards with which the cellar is covered are also burning...

"They left. I think: what should I do? I'll just burn up, and no one will find me, or I'll suffocate in the smoke!... Once my husband had measured the potato-bin to fence it in with boards, and a stick was left there. I crawled out, took that stick... Of course, it was so hot — they had set fire to all the buildings — there was a puddle of water near the threshold of the cellar. Well, I just hurled that hemp over there, and it fell into the water and went out...

"They came again, ger-gerred something... I only understood that they were saying: 'Nits nema.'* But they didn't close that cellar, and went away. And they left.

"But I sat there then until morning. And my sister had a dog, and all night — oh me, oh my! — did it bark, oh, did it bark!... And what do I know — maybe they left, or maybe, I think, they stayed... I sat there all night.

"But in the morning my husband came. That dog sure did bark at him, and then she recognized him. He comes up to the doors, and I say to him: 'Misha, is that you?'

"'It's me,' he says. 'Maybe the children are here, too?'

"'No,' I says, 'they aren't.'

"'Well, where are they?'

"'I don't know where. They were at my sister's, at Lupinovich's...'

"He says: 'Something's lying there on his threshing-floor, in the barn. Maybe the cow and horse got burnt there.'

"I say: 'No, Misha dear, they took all of that, the Germans and policemen went and took all the cattle with them. That,' I says, 'is maybe his family and children...'

* *Nits nema* (Polish) — There's nothing.

"That's just what it was... Those two older children of his... And mine, where they sat on the floor ... near the stove... The house was new, a good one. When it burnt, they also... The bricks collapsed on them there... And there they were baked... Afterwards we only found their little bones. And the buttons from their little dresses...

"Otherwise they burnt all up...

"We took away those bodies, buried them. We didn't make coffins. We just spread towels and buried them. Only afterwards we carried them to the graveyard.

"That's how it was.

"My other sister's little boy burnt up, and she herself burnt up. And my sister's husband... He was on his way to get hay in Voronisko, his own hay, and they knifed him there on the island... Germans. They were walking there through the woods, they stopped him and there they knifed him. I didn't see him, but my husband said he was all cut up, there was not an inch of flesh left untouched.

"That's how they had their fun with the people!...

"My husband was with the partisans afterwards. And afterwards he came back from the war and he fell ill, and died. And, you know, such a misfortune befell us: they stole a cow from our cattle-shed after the war. And he had been a little sick with bercurlosis, and he got well, he went for a check-up and the doctor in Slutsk said, 'Good boy, you're well, only a little scar, like a little hair, is left. Take care of yourself,' he says. And then, when they stole the cow, he went around looking for that cow, and worried about it: the children were small, and it was after the war, see, when this happened, there was a dearth of everything, and everything had burnt, clothes and everything in the world, and he grieved so that he died, leaving his small children...

"Well, that's how I lived, my dears. I went to work in the collective farm... And oh me, oh my – after the war there wasn't anything in the world... And afterwards I managed to bring them up somehow and educate them, see... I was one of the permanent workers, calves alone I tended maybe twelve, ... and everything in the world I did... And they gave me timber. My son was in the army. Twice they gave some to me. And I did over this little cottage.

"The children have gone their own ways, and there's no one to live here..."

Maria Tarasovna's "little cottage" is certainly adequate, neat and tidy on the outside and clean inside. Only it's a little bare still, as the mistress of the house says, "there's no new furniture". There's a table and three chairs, and a bed in the kitchen. And strewn all over the large, clean, furnitureless expanse of the floor on the day we came were dolls, toys and bits of rag. The day before Maria Tarasovna's grandchildren, the children of her daughter born after the war, had come to visit from the neighbouring village; such events are true holidays for the lonely old woman.

Maria Tarasovna is glad to see people, and we had a hard time refusing her refreshments, particularly when she tempted us with her most prized fare: "I'll treat you to some salt-pork, lads..." She saw us out into the street and cordially wished us a good trip.

Zhavorlki is a village in the northern part of Kopyl District, near the beautiful region of woods and meadows where the river Neman has its source.

We found **Ivan Trofimovich** and **Agata Ghermanovna Kuzmich** at home. The old man

was resting after herding back the cows from their morning pasturage, and his wife was pottering about in the kitchen.

As is the custom, we started with the head of the household. He gradually warmed up to the conversation, began to talk, got a little mixed up, cried a bit, and then waved his hand, saying: "Better let her tell it!...", the more so as his wife had on several occasions tried to come to his aid.

And so Agata Ghermanovna sat down in front of the microphone.

"... I sent him off, my husband, together with my son. I says to them: 'Go away and hide somewhere in Kudinovichi, and I'll guard everything here.'

"Because that's the way it was, that those who ran away, they took everything from them, and those who didn't run away, they didn't take anything from. The police, the Germans and some Magyars they were. And so I made up my mind: 'You go ahead, I've already lived my life, and if they kill me, at least I'll be home. And if they don't kill me, they'll take everything away, and we'll be left with nothing.'

"He went to Kudinovichi with the little lad, and then when those Germans came, they came back again. And I says: 'Lord, what did you come back for? Go off again with that child.'

"Then he went and dropped in on my cousin. Theirs wasn't a partisan's family. They'd said they'd kill the partisans' families, but not the others.

"'You, children, split up among those families that aren't partisans', and that way, maybe, you'll stay alive. Nobody'll give you away.'

"So then. They found me at home. He says: 'Partisan, Partisan Kuzmich, you have a son with the partisans.'

"They took out this paper, and on it were written the partisan families. Someone had written them down! And he says: 'Here it says Kuzmich, Mikhail, is with the partisans, he was mobilized three days ago.'

"'What can I say, sir...' (I had to save myself somehow.) 'What can we do against weapons: a partisan comes with weapons, and then a German comes with weapons... And we don't have anything to do with it, we're not to blame.'

"'A-ha,' he says, 'you partisan scum! Partisan mother!...'

"And he hit me in the breast with his revolver. Didn't shoot, but bashed me. It hurt so!...

"'Hang her! Go look for a rope!'

"And sitting in my house are a whole lot of those polizeis, in white smocks, officers with shoulder-straps, tall cockades, and they're talking both Russian and German. And they shout at me: 'Own up!'

"And I say: 'Sir, I'm illiterate, I'm scared. Ask the men, maybe they'll tell you something.'

"They tortured me and tortured me, and I didn't say anything. Well, he wrote something, kept writing something, and then he ran off, that boss. The others are sitting in the kitchen. And my throat was so dry, if only I could drink a drop of water. I couldn't stand it any more, I was like all numb. I'd already forgotten all about my children even, that I had any. Well, like numb I was. I'll go and get a drink of water, I think.

"And they shriek at me: 'Where are you going?'

"And I says: 'My dears, how can I run away from you anywhere? There's so many, such a mass of you sitting here, and I'm alone, and you think I'll run away. Give me some water.'

"They let me by, I swallowed some water and went back and sat down in the same place. I sit there, waiting for death...

“Then one man from our village came running and says: ‘Go to the meeting. They’re summoning partisan families separately.’”

“I quickly put on a sheepskin coat and made for the door. He just runs toward me, the one who was there before, the boss.

“‘And where are you going?’ he says.

“And another one mumbled to him in German that I was going ‘to the group’.

“As soon as he let me go I went to this neighbour of mine – at least I’ll go bid farewell to my little girl. And I says to her: ‘Nadka, my darling daughter! They’re going to kill me, but you go hide somewhere...’ (*She cries.*)

“I go out of their house. I don’t know what pushed me – I went into the boxroom, and there’s a little ladder going up there, and I climb up it. I think: ‘I don’t want to fall into their hands so they’ll kill me and my child will see me...’ I climbed up, crawled into a corner and sit there all crouched up. It’s cold, I’m nearly naked...

“They’re looking for me already: they ask the master of the household where Agata Kuzmich is... And he said she went through the village.

“And then his wife climbs up.

“‘Go away from here, otherwise we’ll get it, too, because of you...’

“I beg her: ‘Sister, my dove, let me sit here for a while until they leave... Just say you didn’t see me, that I’m nowhere to be found...’

“She gave in and climbed down. I think: I’ll bury myself in the oats bin that’s standing there. I crawled into the oats, lay down in them and raked some on top of me... I was cold, the cold was seeping into me... I’d freeze all the same... Better let them kill me. I crawled out and sat there again. She came and again...

“Well, so I made up my mind to come out and go down the street to the other end. Those Germans don’t know me after all, I thought.



Agata Kuzmich, the mother of a partisan

АСТРЕЙКА В. И.
АСТРЕЙКА А. М.
АСТРЕЙКА И. В.
АСТРЕЙКА Е. А.
АСТРЕЙКА Т. В.
АСТРЕЙКА А. В.
АСТРЕЙ Ю. А.
АСТРЕЙКА М. И.
АСТРЕЙКА Д. П.
АСТРЕЙКА Ю. И.
АСТРЕЙКА М. Г.
АСТРЕЙКА Н. Ю.
АСТРЕЙКА Ф. Ю.
АСТРЕЙКА Г. Ю.
АСТРЕЙКА З. А.
АСТРЕЙКА С. Н.
АСТРЕЙКА О. И.
АСТРЕЙКА М. М.
АСТРЕЙКА В. А.
АСТРЕЙКА А. И.
АСТРЕЙКА А. И.
АСТРЕЙКА В. И.

"...Again we see those terrifying columns
of identical names..."

"I went over to where my married daughter lived, she had given birth to a little boy, two months... No, two weeks old he was. And her husband was with the partisans, and she was hiding. In someone else's house she was hiding. I begged them to let me into their barn, and the mistress of the house says: 'Go ahead and hide. I don't mind. If they kill you I won't be to blame, and if they don't kill you, it will be your good luck.'

"Then she let me into that shed, my daughter gave me a blanket, there was lots of straw in that shed, many people stored their hay there – I crawled in there, pulled out some straw from over by the back doors, crawled into the very middle, into a big hole and sit there like this.

"The sister of my daughter's husband comes running in to me.

"Auntie, I've come to hide with you!"

"Come on," I says, 'it will be more cheerful with two of us, and warmer.'

"She climbed on top of me into that same hole, and we sat there, the two of us. That whole day, and night, and one more day...

"The owner of that shed came and brought some cured ham. We say: 'What's doing there? Bring us a drop of water at least! We're parched with thirst here.'

"And she says: 'Oh my dears, I'll light the stove and bring you something warm.'

"And what's doing there?"

"And she says: 'They're going from house to house, looking for military clothes. And if they search my house, they'll take away this meat from me, and what will I eat?'

"She was a widow. And so she'd brought the ham to hide it. She was the aunt of that girl that was sitting there together with me.

"And she doesn't come back..."

"And the girl says: 'I'll go and tear her to pieces there. She might have spared a drop of water.

We'll burn up with thirst...'

"And I says: 'Don't go. Maybe something happened there. Let's wait, maybe later we'll somehow...'

"And they keep shooting with a machine-gun: ta-ta-tah! ta-ta-tah!... It's daylight already, the sun's already shining. And we don't know anything. I says: 'Let's rake aside this straw and peek through the crack at what's going on in the world.'

"We burrowed through – and everything's burning! They're driving away the cows, the cows are bellowing... I say: 'It's all over now! No one is left, neither my children, nor my husband – no one... (*She cries.*) I'm left off alone. What shall I do?' I say.

"What happened next?... There, in that barn, was a mare. And she had not drunken or eaten anything. She's neighing away!... Suddenly she starts to stamp her hooves! She senses what's going on in the world... And they came, they heard her. Many of them. Ger-ger, ger-ger... They untied that mare, kindled the straw in the middle and went off. Clip-clop, clip-clop: the mare went off, and they went off...

"And inside that shed – j-j-j-j! – the straw is crackling. I say: 'What shall we do? Let's get up and get out somehow.'

"And it's burning there in front. It's not yet burning in back. And we're sitting there, in back. She says: 'We'll burn. It will hurt real bad before we die. Let's crawl out!'

"She crawled out. But there's a panel there. I says: 'Hit it with your foot, maybe you'll knock out a board.'

"She bangs at it, and we're scared they might hear. There's no way you can knock it out with your foot.

"We won't be able to do anything,' she says. 'Let's go through the fire!'

"She's young, of course, and healthy... (*She*

cries.) And she doesn't have anyone, of course, that girl. When she started out through the fire, everything on her blazed up: her kerchief, and everything, and she rolled in the snow – it went out!... And I say: 'Lord, carry me through, too! I don't want to perish either!...'

"I went and covered myself up with my sheepskin coat, and ran! I scorched my hands... (*She cries.*) I ran through the fire. And quickly dove into the snow, too..."

"We lay there, lay there for a while... We feel we're still alive. We look and see they're still there, those villains, they'll kill us anyway..."

"We lay there right until evening. And the night was clear and frosty. We started to crawl. She in front and I behind her... And we had a club-house there. And they hadn't yet taken the machine-guns from the club. When they noticed us, that we were crawling, they fired at us from a machine-gun: teh-teh-teh!... And the bullets are whistling! They stop shooting, and we start crawling again, like those soldiers. And they fire at us again. Blood is running from our knees, blood is running from our hands. They'd frozen. Without mittens. It was winter. There was lots of snow then..."

"Lord, if only there were some bush!..."

"Soon we'd be finished... We crawled out to the end of the village."

"Come on," I says, 'let's go standing up.'

"We got up, took each other by the hand and went. And blood is running from us, and our wounds are freezing... We walked to the settlement, stepped into a house. Where's my family? I don't have any children, anything – everything burnt up!... I head back for the fire, but they

don't let me. And why, oh why should I live alone!..."

"So they didn't let me go. I'm sitting on the stove. The pain is unbearable. I'm crying."

"And then – my husband comes! Praise the dear Lord that at least he was left!..."

"How sorry for all the children: where is Fanya and her baby, and where is Nadka? (*She cries.*) And my little Tolya, where is he?... They killed the lad, they killed the girl, she was seventeen, and such a beauty... (*She cries.*) I can't tell you... I got away with my life. Better had I perished!..."

While telling her story, old Agata would every once in a while nervously pound her fists or her palms on the table-top. When we asked her not to spoil the tape this way, she obeyed and henceforth banged her hands on her skirt, either separately or else joining them as in prayer.

The old man listened to her, nodding his head in agreement from time to time and wiping away his tears, when he didn't forget about them...

When the old woman reached the point where she had had to hurl herself through the flames, she wrung her hands over her head and, gasping "Lord!", broke into sobs. Ivan Trofimovich also shook with sobs, no longer merely helpless, but almost as defenceless as a child.

"And my daughter ran off into the woods with her baby," said the old woman after calming down somewhat. "Only our little son was left... He came back wounded then. I nursed that leg of his, bathed it in potions and kissed it for joy that at least one child was left in the house..."

The Men

In the village of Kostyukovich, Mozyr District, where defenceless civilians were gassed to death in vans, the men were separated in the street from the women and children. One little boy rushed from his mother to his father... A member of the punitive detachment grabbed the child by the arm and was about to throw him into a well. And his father, Sofron Kamensky, broke through from the fence, where the men were standing, to the German and managed to strike him and even throw him down the well.

None of his fellow-villagers who themselves witnessed this scene were left alive. It was an unmasked polizei who told about it at his trial after the war. And the legend of this father's bitter courage spread around the district...

In telling the tragedy of Gandarevo, the village where she was born, **Zonya Mikhailovna Bogdanovich**, a salesclerk in a Slutsk store, recalled the following incident:

"...Yanik Alinovsky and his son were carrying a bucket of chaff to give to their horse, and these Germans were coming... And a German shot the son, and Yanik grabbed an axe from his belt and killed that German.

"When he killed that German with his axe, they went and killed the rest. Everyone!... They killed everyone, set the place on fire and left...

"Alinovsky's name was Yan, but even when he was fifty they called him affectionately Yanik. And his son Lyudvis was about seventeen. Yanik had an axe in his belt, and he hit the German on the head. He killed that German, and another German killed him."

QUESTION: "Did you see that yourself?"

"We all saw it. We were standing in the street, you know. As he was walking along like that with

his son, the German shot his son — bang! And he, grabbing out the axe, — he let him have it! The German fell. And they immediately wrapped him up in a sheepskin coat, in various sheets — they took them from us then — they wrapped him up, put him in a wagon and took him with them, that German..."

"We all saw it," said Zonya Mikhailovna. Yet apart from her no one can now bear witness to the event, because all the inhabitants of the small village of Gandarevo were killed that morning (that was what the punitive detachment had come for, after all), and of the girls who were selected to be sent to Germany, only she is alive today. One of her younger brothers, twelve-year-old Mikolai, was also to escape the shooting, but he did not see the incident with Alinovsky, for he was already hiding behind the barns at the time it happened. (His story can be found in the chapter "Over Ten".)

The rest of this chapter is entirely devoted to the accounts of men.

We found **Ivan Karpovich Sakovets** among the garden beds in front of the windows of his little wooden house, which opens onto a small lane in the township of Krupka, Minsk Region. The sun was just setting in a clear sky after a day of rain and clouds. Ivan Karpovich, who is already on pension, turned out to be a sociable person, and he took us into his apartment and told us about what happened in his native village of Uznazh in the fall of 1942.

"...I was married, I had a wife and three children. When the Germans surrounded Uznazh, I stayed home. Some Germans spent the

night at our house. And I went over to my father's. My house was at the very end of the village, but I was afraid. Because partisans had camped out at my place before that... So I went over to my father's. He lived in the middle of the village.

"They spent the night, and early in the morning they gathered us in the middle of the village — everyone, both old and young, and those who were sick, they carried out. And they started to interrogate us. The burgomaster of Vydritsa — Karan was his name, Rygor Vasilyevich Karan — he knew me from childhood: my mother was from Vydritsa and I was there all the time at my grandfather's when I was small. Well, so he wanted to wipe out Uznazh. Partisans had camped in our village, and there in Vydritsa they had pill-boxes. The partisans attacked and smashed those pill-boxes. And these polizeis... There were a few Frenchmen there. They all ran away to Krupka. They killed several policemen, but that burgomaster escaped. But they killed his wife. And set his house on fire. Well, he had six children, I think, but they didn't touch his children.

"And afterwards, when they ran away to Krupka, a big detachment set out for our village, and those Germans, that punitive detachment, came to our village.

"They held an interrogation. There was some investigator there, a Russian. He spoke pure Russian, but he was in German uniform. And they summoned me there from the list. The burgomaster brought me. One German is standing there with a stick, off to the side, in the house. And he brought me in and says: 'Why don't you hand in your produce?'

"'I don't have my own barn.'

"And he says: 'And why do you give things to the partisans?'

"I say: 'The partisans have weapons, they come in themselves and take things, and what can I do to them?'

"What can I say? And the burgomaster says: 'He has two brothers with the partisans.' Accusing me.

"And I say: 'Ask the peasantry. My brothers were taken as regulars.'

"Aha. Well, he writes that down. He wrote it down, and then the burgomaster says: 'He has ties with the partisans.' Referring to me. 'We,' he says, 'captured a woman partisan in Vydritsa, and she said he had ties.'

"He wrote that down and says: 'Take him!'

"He led me out. Partisan families were there. He stood me in line. Near the gate, as luck would have it. About seven people were standing there, and I was the eighth. I was standing like this at the end, near the wicket-gate. The gate was open. A partisan family is standing with us. And they stood me there, too. Well, I know my brothers are with the partisans — they'll kill me anyway. Then I think: let them kill me on the run if they kill me. I didn't think they'd wipe out my family. Well, so I was standing next to the gateway, and the gate is open, and a German is guarding us separately, see, with a tommy-gun... If he'd stood across from me, I, of course, wouldn't have escaped, but he was walking back and forth — about four steps this way and that. As soon as he started that way, and I was standing right there next to the gate, he didn't turn back, and I made a dash through that gate! The yard was fenced in. About seventy metres away — there were bushes there, a swamp. Well, I was young, about thirty two. I just took to my heels. 'Well,' I think, 'they'll kill me on the run.' I jumped over the fence! There are no shots or anything. He didn't notice, turned round and didn't notice me. There wasn't any outpost there, there were outposts all around, but near the

swamp — there wasn't any.

"And that's how I got away.

"Everyone was killed.

"I came back later, looked — there wasn't anybody. Where my father lived, a pit was dug up in the vegetable garden, and they threw them all into that pit... Both young and old — everyone...

"Three hundred and sixty people..."

* * *

Mikolai Pavlovich Branovitsky lives in the village of Rakhovichy in the southern part of Soligorsk District, Minsk Region.

All around on the horizon stretch what used to be partisans' woods, but the swamp that once lay here has given way to a high-yield plain, split up into cultivated land and hayfields. From the high, gravelled street the houses with their fences and lean-tos seem to be drowning in a green flood of potatoes.

Mikolai Branovitsky begins his story:

"...We were in the woods — all our clan. We sent a reconnaissance party, made up of our folks, to see whether all was quiet at home. Well, they reported that all was quiet. And so we went home. You know, there were small children, they had to be warmed and dried...

"I had just lit the stove when Germans appeared on the doorstep. And where are you going to hide? Well then, they ransacked everything. The German police. One German just shouted: 'Raus!' I understand a little what 'raus' means — go out or git, something like that. They drove us out — both my wife and children...

"As soon as we came out into the yard, a young polizei shouts: 'Hey, householder, go on back and give us some honey!'

"He didn't pronounce it like honey. Aha, I think, wait a minute: from the way he pronounced it, they must be Ukrainians. I say: 'I don't have any honey.'

"Collect some!"

"I started to collect some from my bees, but there isn't time, they're chasing everyone. Chasing everyone already. And they came after me and drove me there, too. All my clan. They gathered twenty-six of us: old men, children...

"They drove us into a shed and ordered: 'Pray to God!'

"Some pray, others whatever...

"Say goodbye!"

"Well, we began to say goodbye to each other. You know, there was crying there, it was awful... And then they say: 'Get down on your knees, face the wall!'

"I, you know, got up and said as follows: 'Are you people or some kind of ... or some kind of beasts, or what are you? What are you shooting us for? Well, you're out to shooting partisans. Well, I'm a partisan, shoot me. But why should you a babe in arms? Or an old man who can hardly walk? What are you?...' "

"They didn't say anything in reply to that question of mine. They started to shoot with tommy-guns. I fell. And my wife threw her arms around my neck and fell on top of me. And more bodies fell, from that close range from a tommy-gun not one bullet could pass through the other bodies to hit me. Only my right side, the way I was lying, see, in this position, well, it was hit by three bullets, and two more here, and one... Six bullets.

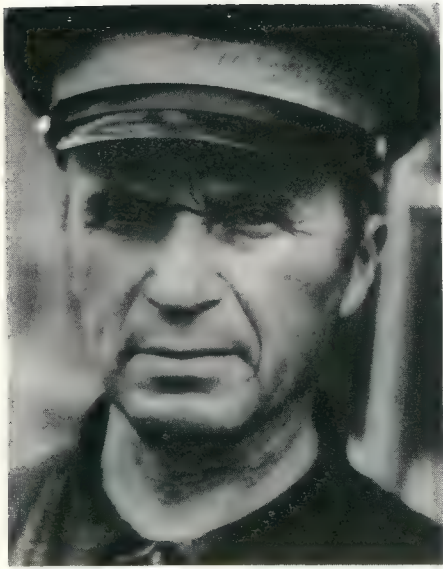
"They shot for a long time. One woman was hit, she fell on a child, it cried a lot...

"My middle daughter, she was five, started to cry. She says: 'Dad, Daddy, it hurts a lot!...' "

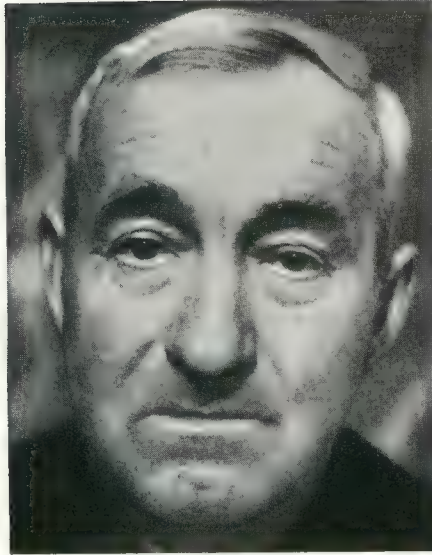
"I say: 'Quiet, sweetie, don't cry.'



Mikhail Kozel



Ivan Sakovets



Mikolai Branovitsky

“‘Oh, Daddy, I can’t stand it!

“As soon as she started to cry, they let loose such a volley at her from the tommy-gun that her skull flew apart and her brains spattered onto the wall, and she died. I saw that with my own eyes...

“My wife was killed right away.

“Well, so I’m lying there under the bodies. It grew quiet. Then something starts humming. What’s that humming? A plane? I get up from under the bodies. O-o-o! The roof is falling in already, it’s burning! The people are burning with a blue flame. Either they poured something over them, or else it just flared up like that. You know, that’s fat after all, people’s bodies. Whatever you may say. They’re burning with a blue flame, just like gasoline! I scrambled onto the burning wall, wanted to get onto the hay. When I scrambled up my felt boots slipped off and I was

left barefoot. Then two more women climbed up – my first cousin and my neighbour. There’s nowhere to go, we’re burning – the roof is already caving in. I, you know, crouched down and said softly: ‘There’s one way – to run out through the door.’

“They had closed the doors. We were in the corner, and had to run over the bodies. And suddenly I made a dash!... Those bodies are burning and twisting – I jumped over them and crashed into the door with my arms. You couldn’t breathe anymore. I crashed into the door so hard that both halves opened. I fell down and drew a breath of moist air. Smoke is billowing up. The barn was big, the roof and hay are burning... And I ran in that smoke. And ran up against – Germans!... Germans were standing there. German transport. I turned back and went into the smoke again. And

there was a pit near my brother's.

"And I hopped into that pit.

"I was all bloody: the bodies had lain on top of me, see...

"My tracks on the snow were covered with ashes. And I sat there approximately till midnight. Then I got up. What should I do? I couldn't feel my arms: I had bad burns, boils came out, these big blisters on my arms. And I was barefoot. I had to put something on my feet. Some laundry was hanging on my brother's fence, clean laundry. I took it. I knotted up the sleeves in that laundry, pulled them on over my feet and slowly clumped to my house. It was about a hundred and fifty metres away.

"True, first I went over to the bodies. The women that had run after me are lying all burnt up on the threshold... Maybe they got caught in the bodies or in their clothes? Or maybe the Germans shoved them back?...

"I went into my flat, took a blanket, took some good string, took some sheets, took a couple of towels, in case I found one of our people somewhere, to make him a bandage. I tore up the blanket in the bushes, wound it round my legs, bound them up and slowly got moving..."

Mikolai Branovitsky returned to his native Rakhovichi a war invalid. Now he walks with the aid of crutches. He tells his story in a restrained way, but all the same his eyes are full of tears.

"...I often remember my daughters who were killed. Would you believe it, one was born on the Eighth of March, the second on the First of May, and the third during the Seventh of November holidays. It would be great to celebrate their birthdays!..."

And today this man has a new family, and a house, and enough to live comfortably.

That's memory for you...

★ ★ ★

Mikhail Andreyevich Kozyol lives in the village of Krasnoye, Shchuchin District, Grodno Region. We found him covering the roof of his house with slate. He invited us into a clean room filled with flower-pots and recounted something he had probably already told more than once in the thirty years since it happened, recounted it straightforwardly and with fresh emotion.

"...Now I live in Krasnoye, but then I was living in Lyakhovtsy.

"My pa used to thresh in the morning, and I did bootmaking work. My pa got a stomach-ache for some reason, and he comes and wakes me up: 'Get up, go thresh.'

"I got up, put on my boots, grabbed the door-handle, and I was shoved right back!... They drove me over to where the people were gathered from the whole village.

"They herded together all the inhabitants of Lyakhovtsy. At first people stood without any order, but then they lined them up in three files. And after some time their commissar came out and read that a forester had been killed, meaning everyone here was 'bandits' helpers'. And for that twenty-five people would be shot today. Then he got out a list and began to read out from the list: so and so, and so and so, so and so... They called us forth and immediately surrounded us with machine-guns.

"They were all dressed in grey German uniforms, spoke German among themselves and Polish with us. Through and interpreter. And the commissar himself spoke a bit of Polish.

"They herded us into Vorobyov's house, and

then they came and didn't summon people forth, but just took whoever was nearest — five at a time.

"When we were sitting inside the house, I sat down at the table, and here all of us chosen ones, men and women friends, bade farewell to each other... When they had led away the first five, we in the house could hear the rattle of the tommy-guns there... And as soon as the tommy-guns rattled, after about five minutes, the Germans came again, again took five people and led them there.

"I, of course, could have gone with the last lot, they were taking those closest to the doors. If only you knew what went on in that house! Utter chaos! I didn't cry or anything... I sat there and thought. They shot one group of five, took a second group to be shot. I could have gone with the last lot, but I thought 'However long you sit, you won't escape the bullet.' I step outside then and say: 'Who else is going?'

"Everyone is huddling in the corner...

"A German shoved the other four out the door after me.

"I stepped out — the commissar is standing right there. I ask him in Polish what they're going to shoot me for. And he goes: 'Lous,* bandite!'

"I had no thought of escaping, where could you run to? On one side there was a high fence, the graveyard, and on the left side of the street was the medic's high fence, a picket-fence. Where could you run away? Then I walked about twenty metres, and something urged me: 'Run!' But where to? If I jump onto the fence, they'll kill me right away, you can't jump over it fast. So I walked on and on... To the right was a street. Here, I think. If I go straight, they'll kill me. I see them throwing those who've been shot into a pit. I had about twenty or thirty metres left to go. And the gates into Mikolai's yard were ajar. I drew even with the gates and — boy, did I give it to the

* *Lous* (distorted German *Los!*) — get out of here.

German who was on my right! — he immediately flew head over heels! And I darted through the gates. And right nearby was the house. I dashed round the corner, and they're firing at me... They didn't hit me. I ran through the backyard and into the street. Jumped over the fence and tore down the street. And they began to shoot at me with the machine-gun through the graveyard — from where those people that had been herded together were standing. I ran to the very end of the street, to Lyuba's, and there, where they were doing the shooting, stood a heavy machine-gun. It began to fire at me. And about thirty more people are shooting... Well, I ran, kept falling flat. They didn't even wound me. I remember I crawled and crawled, and as soon as you begin to crawl the guns start up — tuh-tuh-tuh!... The machine-gun shot at me most of all. Some juniper was growing there. I crawled up to that juniper and — hop. And into the pine forest. On the double, on the double through that pine forest. The pine forest comes to an end. To the right is a farmstead and a field. On the left I have the Germans all the time, but to the right, where the farmstead is, there aren't any Germans. 'I'll cut across that field,' I think. I glanced back, see three Germans standing there! But I make for the farmstead all the same. Boy, did they start shooting at me!... I reached the farmstead, ran behind it — the firing stopped. Some planks lay over the stream, I ran across on those planks, like by some miracle. Beyond the stream, about three hundred metres away, was an alder grove, and I ran there. The Germans walked up to the edge of the stream, stood there, stood there for a while and went back.

"Nobody else from our village survived then. Only Mikolai Stasyukevich tried to escape, but he only ran about twenty metres and — they killed him on the fence.



"I had two older sisters, and Mother was carrying the baby... He was a year old. And my sister was carrying the other boy, two he was. They led us up to the shed. Then I somehow ran ahead of my sister. The German shot her in the back of the head and she knocked me off my feet, and that's how I was left..."

Yevgenia Bardun



**Makar Zayats with
his grand-daughter**

“Twenty-seven people, I think, were killed then.

“When I ran away, those Germans that chased after me came back. The senior German, who was the commander there – people told me afterwards – he sure let that German have it, who had been escorting me.

“And then they took my pa because of me and shot him. They also wanted to take my mother, but they talked among themselves for some time, and she was left...”

In his time Mikhail Andreyevich, as a native of western Byelorussia, had been a soldier in the Polish army, and in September of 1939 he met the Germans in battle. After the shooting described above, he, naturally, became a partisan. He's a real man. But ever so often as he tells his tale, tears well up in his eyes and he can't even speak. Evidently it's because of his father... Or else they're tears of injury and rage – of human injury and righteous rage, feelings which even revenge cannot erase, cannot appease...

* * *

Makar Karpovich Zayats lives in a handsome house surrounded by a green orchard in the village of Usakino, Klichev District, Mogilyov Region. He is a tall, burly man, who looks younger than his "seventy-odd" years. When we first saw him he was carrying his little granddaughter on a visit from the city. This prickly, loud-voiced grandfather could obviously also be kind and gay.

"...We have many Zayatses here in our village, but I'm the only Makar Karpovich."

QUESTION: "So you're the very Zayats* that killed a German?"

"The very one, the very one! (*He laughs.*)

"Our men were retreating. They passed through here, too. A division. And I lived at the end of the village. And those in command keep coming to me to eat something. We lived in the woods. I gave them once, I gave them twice, and then there wasn't anything left to give. And I says: 'Fellers, I won't be able to feed you all anyway, and my children will be left without anything. The collective farm's potatoes have already grown some over there. What the hell if they're small, there's no point saving them. The fascists will take them anyways.'"

"Well, they were encircled by the Germans. They dug up some potatoes.

"You have a horse?"

"Yup."

"Bring them to us."

"We did so. The next day they come again, even more. Lieutenant Ivan Minovich, he fought in the civil war. They asked me about him: if there was anybody left of those who were encir-

* *Zayats* - "hare" in Russian. - *Ed.*

cled. I took them and showed them where he was hiding. We dug up two wagon-loads of potatoes and took them to them at the range.

"Akhrem Bobovik found out, went to the police and informed the Germans. And our lads had already broken through somewhere near Drut. And Akhrem says: 'That guy there carted food to the bandits.'"

"Well, they picked me up at night."

QUESTION: "Did you have a large family?"

"Four children and my wife. And they picked up all of us. They picked up people in the woods, too: combed the woods they did. They started to shoot people.

"They're beating me.

"Take us to where the partisans are! Take us to where you brought the bandits food!..."

"And Ivan Minovich is right there, they picked him up, too. And they say to me: 'If you take us there, you'll live, if you don't, we'll shoot you!'"

"I led them to the edge of the field, and there's no way I can wriggle out of it... And he beats me. But I kept dodging; each time he'd raise his arm, the German, I'd keep ducking to the side, to the side. Just like some - those guys who fight - boxer. And then he hit me hard with the butt of his gun on the back of my head - I fell down.

"My family is right there together with me, too. They take one of the children and shoot him.

"Just take us there and we won't shoot these!..."

"And I know that if I take them there, I'll drink more of other people's blood than they'll spill of my own. I didn't take them."

QUESTION: "And they shot your child there?"

"They shot one child, they shot the second, and the third was hidden by the carters. The fourth, that is, the eldest. He lives in Leningrad now."

QUESTION: "And how did they hide

him — in a cart?”

“Nope. They gave him a whip, and he went to turn the horses. He hid in a furrow. The carters told him to. That’s how he was left alive, and he’s still alive today. And then they shot the missus, too. And then they took me to be shot, too.

“Well, they’re taking me to be shot, and I’m thinking of hooking it. But what can you do? One man leading the two of us. I went on ahead and saw a German. When they were killing us, he was standing there talking German. Then he went on ahead, and now he’s coming back toward us and says in Russian: ‘Maybe you don’t know where they’re taking you. They’re taking you to be shot.’”

QUESTION: “He said it so the other Germans wouldn’t hear?”

“Nope, a German was walking along with us, but he didn’t understand Russian. And this one, he was dressed in a German uniform and had a revolver. Then he had spoken German with the Germans, but now he spoke Russian with us. It wasn’t the interpreter: the interpreter stayed behind, but when they got us moving, he went on ahead, as if he had some business in the bushes... And now he’s walking back toward us.

“‘They’re taking you to be shot,’ he says.

“O-o-o! Lord! They shot my family and now they’re going to shoot me... I’ll try and hook it. I turn like this toward the edge of the path, to dash into the woods. And he hits me one with his tommy-gun between my shoulders. And I... It’s later, at the front, that my arms were wounded, but then did I ever bash him! — and he fell on his back and his tommy-gun flew away. I jumped astride him, grabbed the gun and — bang! — shot him. That Ivan Minovich ran off to one side, and I, to the other. The second threw a grenade under me, but the grenade didn’t harm me in the least...”

QUESTION: “So you shot him with the tommy-gun, too?”

“Well, naturally! If I hadn’t shot him, well, he had a revolver, you know. And the other German, you say?... There were many, many of them Germans. But in that uproar... I fought in three wars and know that in an uproar no one knows or understands anything. While they got their bearings... I moved off maybe about ten metres away from the Germans, not far off, and it was a real uproar!...

“Well, there, that’s all my story.”

QUESTION: “And afterwards where’d you go, join the partisans?”

“Nope. I got ill. Sick I got. Well, where’d I go? Went to Zakutye, to the detachment. I knew the chief of the detachment, so I went to him. I’m walking along and it seems — people are playing and singing... But there’s nobody anywhere. It’s in my head. I got disturbed. Yes... And he says to me: ‘You know what, I’ll call a doctor for you.’

“The doctor gave me some shots and says: ‘Go to a quiet place.’

“I stayed in a quiet place for a while. And later on I was on the staff. I had Lyoshka’s trust... I forgot his last name. He was called Lyoshka. That’s what I called him. He was your age. And I was there all the time.”

QUESTION: “In a maintenance platoon?”

“Nope, as an orderly. Generally speaking, I guarded him. His bodyguard I was. His trusted man.”

QUESTION: “At that time, in ’forty-two, Susha* was burnt twice?”

“Nope, the first time the partisans didn’t let them. They knew they were going to burn Susha. Here, where you see the forest, and on the hill

* Susha — a neighbouring village. See the chapter “Two Old Ages”.

Forester
Alexander Zauer



over there — the partisans were there with heavy machine-guns. They killed a whole pile of them, of the Germans. Zayats, known as Bobovik, who was guiding the Germans, started to call to them: 'This way!' and waved his arm for them to run after him. He knew where to go. He was born here, but he didn't kick off here...

"Well, that was the first time they came. The next time they had a greater force... And no one could deal with them then."

QUESTION: "And what did they do here?"

"Well, what do you think, slaughtered people. Entirely wiped out two settlements. Seven people were left, that weren't at home. 'To the meeting! To the meeting! To the meeting!' They drove everyone out. There was one settlement here and one settlement here, and they killed them in the potato field in the middle..."

★ ★ ★

Day in day out, winter and summer, **Alexander Karlovich Zauer** walks the woods. He's a forest ranger and that's his job. A forester has plenty of cares if he is conscientious about his work, and plenty of solitude and time for thinking and reminiscing, particularly if he has something to remember.

This former partisan, now a forest ranger in his native parts, has much to remember, much to grieve about and much to rejoice over... He is a Latvian, one of the few who were left in heroic, martyred Oktyabrsky District after the years of nazi occupation and atrocities. They can be found in the villages of Perekalye, Bulkovo and Zalesye.

"When we Latvians came here, I don't know," said Zauer. "You should ask the old men. There's

one here, Franz Vintars, he was the chairman of our Latvian collective farm Sarkanais Arajs* before the war, and now he's already on pension. But even he won't tell you, because we Latvians came here a long time ago, probably more than a hundred years ago."

We paid a call on old Vintars, who lives in the same village of Bulkovo as Zauer. He is a fine old man, still full of vigour, a former partisan who now works as a shepherd on the state farm, a diligent person, as can be seen from his neatly tended little house, rich with the labour of his hands.

Vintars does not remember when the Latvians settled in this area; probably some misfortune drove them here or a magnate had them move. He doesn't remember, though he himself has lived long and he heard something on the subject from the old men in his youth. The lime-trees on both sides of the street were just as huge back when he was a little boy, and they were planted, that he knows for sure, by his Latvian ancestors.

Alexandr Zauer also has a good house. On this summer day the only person we found at home was one of his sons, a lieutenant on vacation, who was getting ready to go somewhere. The young man said that his father was in the woods but should be back soon. And so he was.

Zauer is a typically strong, hard-working Latvian. He is not very talkative, and can appear even sullen. He speaks good Byelorussian and is sociable in a business-like way.

At first his story was simply the laconic, modest tale of a soldier.

"...I'm sixty-one already. In the war I was with the partisans. When they were burning our Bulkovo, I happened to be in Oktyabrsky, in Smukov — we were lying in ambush there. That was

* *Sarkanais arajs* (Latvian) — Red ploughman.



when the Germans advanced on Oktyabrsky. At the end of January nineteen forty-four. We beat them off then, they didn't enter Oktyabrsky that day, but a couple of days later they came back and occupied it all the same.

"They killed our families here. Drove them out of the woods, herded them into two barns and burnt them there. Right here in our village. All of my kin were there... I had a family of six: my wife, my mother-in-law, my mother-in-law's sister and three children. No one was left... Only my brother was left — he was with the partisans. My little sister was caught in the woods. She was in a death camp, near Ozarichi. Later she was rescued.

"After occupying it, the Germans were here in our village about two months. They killed the people and themselves lived in the village. They were here near Zalesye, they made themselves... a dug-out, so to speak, so the partisans couldn't come near. But we came up. We happened to have a landing force, we came and drove them away again. And drove them out of Zalesye. The landing force and two partisan groups, we were. We fired at them, passed through the village a few times, and they thought there were thousands of us here. The next day they pulled out of there and made for Oktyabrsky. And afterwards we drove them out of Oktyabrsky and they went to Parichi..."

The rest of his account was purely personal. But it is something many people should know about. In response to our curiosity, when we began to express surprise at the large number of enlarged photographs of nice-looking, gay young people on the walls of his large, light-filled house, he went on no less laconically:

"...I took the wife of my buddy. My buddy was a Byelorussian. Mikolai Rygorovich Odinets. He was killed. He got leave to go home to his native

village of Kosarichi. He came there, and they surrounded the village and took them all to be shot. And with him was also Petro Kovzun, he got caught there, too. And he says: 'What are we — cattle? Let's make a run for it!...'

"They started to run. Odinets ran across the field, dashed into the woods, but there was a German reconnaissance party... They killed him.

"And we had made an agreement together earlier: the one who would be left alive should help the other's family. I don't know what he would have done, but I did what was right: I took in his three children. The youngest, Mikolai, was eighteen months.

"She says: 'Will you really take me — with three children?...'

"And I say: 'It's not you I'm taking, but the children — I have to.'

"But since we got along all right, we're living together. Twenty-six years already. We've been living together. We brought up and educated the children, our children are all working. (*Here he began moving from one photograph to the other as he spoke.*) This is her middle daughter. This here is her son, who's in the couple: it was their wedding. And this here is already hers and my first daughter. And this is our son who studied in Leningrad. And this here is our eldest son, he works in Riga. That's my family!... All of them work. Tamara is a plumber, Galya is a crane operator, Ganna is a house painter, Lyda is a telegraph operator, Mikola is a mason, and this one here, Alexandr, is, as you see, an officer. And my Lyubov Andreyevna herself keeps right up with the young people — she's working in the field at the moment. And I work, too. I've been a forest ranger since nineteen forty-eight..."

Alexandr Zauer walks the woods. And in the plentiful solitude, the solitude and tranquility, he finds a lot to stir his thoughts and memory.

Over Ten

"...The very little boys, like the women, they didn't shoot them, but if they were already ten or so, they put them together with the men..."

(**Alexandra Pilipovna Mikhola**p from the village of Stolpishche, Kirovsk District, Mogilyov Region.)

"...They locked the women up separately to burn them, and the men separately. The lads that were older they put in with the men, and the little ones, they were with us."

(**Teklya Yakovlevna Kruglova**. Oktyabrskiy township, Gomel Region.)

"...The Germans loved children... They'd take one in their arms, carry him some, and then — into the fire..."

(**Vital Mikhailovich Shadura** from the village of Zenyaki, Shchuchin District, Grodno Region.)

The first two instances merely illustrate the whim of some "superman" in police or SS uniform; the third confirms yet again that the extermination of children, from the merest babes to adolescents, was an integral part of the Nazi plan to "remake the world" on occupied territory.

One cannot help feeling a special kind of agitation when talking with men who during the years of occupation grew from childhood to the beginnings of maturity, who were already ashamed of their mothers' caresses but were still not yet men.

We reached the village of Baiki, Pruzhany District, Brest Region, on a day in June of a luxuriant summer. After a short downpour, the sun, which was already well past its zenith, grew milder. Old cocks crowed time after time from behind the

wattle fencing. In the distance one could hear the laborious rumble of a tractor. A lark tirelessly pealed forth in song. Perhaps there were many of them, but above us we saw only one.

The children were also making plenty of noise, shouting and laughing somewhere quite near the bench on which we were sitting next to the fence; we couldn't see them — we just heard them.

All we could see was one little girl playing hopscotch all by herself, engrossed in her little game, between us and the house across the way. Her father, the person we had come to visit, was still not back from haymaking. We went over to where we could hear the little boys' shouts and laughter.

We saw them at last, a picturesque gang of barefoot "philosophers and poets", with short forelocks, well-versed in the many secrets of books, films, soccer and hockey matches without ever having had to leave their homes with their TV sets or their village with its club and school. They were having a rest, some sitting on the poles of the fencing, others perched on posts — whatever they found most comfortable after the better part of a long and eventful day. It wasn't vacation time yet. But the end of the school year was no particular hardship for these young men of eleven, twelve, thirteen: they had no exams to lose sleep over or some institute to worry about. Laughter was the very air they breathed, and even in front of the camera it was hard for them to restrain it.

These are the happy peers of those who in the black days of Nazi occupation were as old as they are now, who perished here in this very village along with everyone, both younger and older...

After chatting a bit with the kids, we returned to our bench. The little girl had finished her hopping and run off somewhere. But her father had still not come. We were waiting for him to return so he could tell us how he, whose adolescence had coincided with the war, had escaped the fire and

bullets. So far we knew only one detail about him, which imparted some life to the unknown figure and which we had been told that very day by an old woman, also a former victim. This was that he, **Mikolai Stepanovich Shabunya**, had not been his father's real son but his stepchild; but "pray to God that every blood father love his son as much as his stepfather did Mikolai".

Mikolai Stepanovich came at last with his scythe slung over his shoulder and the sober look of one accustomed to fatigue. He was a little over forty, a calm and strong man. He told us his story sitting at rest on his front porch.

"...We were on our way to Ruzhany in the morning, to saw wood for the burgomaster. We went out onto the highway, and here we see Germans.

"Halt!"

"They come up to us.

"Zurich nach haus!"

"We went home.

"I told my parents, they got worried. We look out the window – they're heading for the headman's in vehicles and on foot.

"Take all your papers and come out!..."

"To where the big spruce still stands today.

"They carried out tables into the street. Whoever had money, a watch, a silver or gilt ring – they took it all clean away and put it in the drawer. They made a corridor of Germans, one German next to the other, about three or four metres apart, and drove the people one after the other, into the barn.

"They drove people here from other villages, from Novosady and Kolki. To dig graves...

"And we're sitting in the barn. One person says one thing, another something else. Today, they say, there'll be a fine sieve. They'll sift everyone. Some they'll take away and kill, and the others

they'll let go. They'll kill those who have relatives with the partisans or who themselves have contacts with them...

"We sat there and sat there and waited to somehow pass through that sieve, those whose lot it would be, and here we all got caught – everyone indiscriminately.

"They started taking people out of the barn – whoever they happened to lay hands on. The men – no more than four or five at a time. There might be all kinds of people among them – some might resist. But as for the women, he forced out as many as he could shove...

"It's now that if man and wife live together they have at the most two or three children, but then each family had five or seven.

"They grab onto their mother's skirt and are dragged along like that...

"The volleys were short. Just enough to wound people. About sixty per cent of the women and children were buried alive.

"Two men died like heroes – Danila Shpak and Semyon Kava.

"Shoot us, you swine, in the face and not in the back of the head!...' they said.

"In the beginning I made a hole in the thatching and looked myself. I saw it. A guard was standing near the barn. If you didn't crawl out they didn't shoot at you. I waved my hand that I wasn't going to crawl out. 'Go ahead and look, if you can stand it – look...' And I looked until they killed my sisters and mother, and those two. And then... As if fear... They killed my kin and fear came over me... I just stood rooted to the ground, without feeling...

"From eight in the morning to four in the afternoon Moscow time, as they say now, they did the checking, and then they started to shoot people. They shot for two hours, not more.

"In the barn people were sitting on the hay and



**The nazis didn't
want us to be born**



smoking, no one tried to be careful then. They heard they were shooting.

"'Lus! Lus!' they'd shout of whoever was closest.

"If he didn't want to, they'd hit him with the butts of their rifles, on the head or somewhere else...

"The uniforms were all German: both grey and black. Those in black mostly stood on guard. The Germans drove people out, brought them over. The shooting was done by those who went over... Well, the police. They'd come from Ivatsevichi, they'd come from Pruzhany, they'd come from Volkovysk, they'd come from Slonim, they'd come from Baranovich. But those that took away our papers spoke German, through an interpreter.

"They killed everybody, but my father and I buried ourselves under the hay. My father first, and I strewed hay over him.

"I burrowed through to the wall, and next to the wall there's a big barrel locked with a padlock. The Germans came and wanted to see what was in the barrel. They smashed it with their rifle butts. And I happened to have dug right up to it. The hay was around one metre and thirty centimetres thick, but if you thinned it out so a person could crawl through, it caved in some. A German was standing on top of me. He smashed the barrel and began to stab around it with his bayonet, right up to my clothes he stabbed.

"'Well,' I think, 'we won't be left anyway, won't get out of this alive.'

"It just happened that way somehow... Maybe a person is fated to live?...

"They left.

"Then one stepped in with a dog. The dog starts barking like mad, and growling!... Then I hear matches being struck. I hear the straw beginning to burn...

"I crawled out onto the threshing-floor.

I remembered my pa was there, too. I took a pitchfork, jabbed around with it — he's moving. I pulled him out. I got slightly scorched, but pa's whole face was burnt for about six months, you couldn't look at him...

"We got out of the barn. It was about six metres from one barn to the next. We saw a person in front of us. We took fright, we stand rooted to the spot, looking at each other. And then we recognize him: it's our neighbour.

"'Is that you?' he asks. 'And the lad's with you?...'

"We got going, the three of us, toward the road.

"And they're setting fire to the last house...

"We ran into a German. He was carrying a sheaf of straw. About two metres away from him I spread out my arms to hold back those that were running behind. He didn't notice me in the smoke, and the yard was narrow. We turned back. I leapt over the fence. The neighbour's hives were piled together for the winter, I darted between them and lay down in a puddle — the snow had melted because of the fire — and I lie there...

"The Germans drove away. 'I'll go and look at the grave', I think. A child's mind... I found some clothes, my mother's and sisters'. They'd undressed everyone down to their underwear...

"The grave where the men were rose up a bit, about twenty centimetres, and blood gushed like a fountain near the wall. And where the women... I swear ... so help me God, that over the women the earth now rose, now sank no less than seventy centimetres or so... It meant they'd only strewn a bit on top, so it wouldn't be visible. Later on they drove people here, on the third day, they added more earth..."

Almost the whole time he was talking a small boy stood behind his back in the doorway. He was one of the merry "philosophers" who had been

sitting on the fence, now grown soberly quiet. He'd move off and come back again cautiously and soundlessly on his bare feet. He was younger than his father had been when they tried to kill him, but still he was already over ten...

The little girl was not interested. After listening for only a short while, she ran out of the yard to seek some new amusement.

And everything over and around us was bathed in the peace of a clear late afternoon.

* * *

The village of Velikaya Volya in Dyatlovo District, Grodno Region, is surrounded by ancient oaks and tall, shapely pines, which also grow in its streets, together with pyramid juniper in the glades between the widely scattered houses. There is a wooden church in the cemetery, beautiful in its bent and hoary old age. The inhabitants have good, sturdy houses, nearly all of them built after the war.

On December 16, 1942, the Germans killed approximately two hundred people here. Among the very few who were lucky enough to escape somehow were two young boys. One of them, the collective-farm stock-breeder, **Alexei Victorovich Lomaka**, gave the following account of that day:

"... At that time I was still a kid, I was just over ten. I remember: the Germans came and began to chase us out of our houses. A German opened the door and said: 'Go outside!' We lived two families in that one house, because our house had burnt down and we lived with the neighbours. We came out of the house and saw that everyone in the village had already been herded together there. They drove us on, about fifty metres maybe, and drew everyone up in a column. I don't remember how many people were there in the column. They ordered us all to get down on our knees, and

a vehicle came up from behind. And we started to say among ourselves that maybe they'd burn us alive... And they started to take pictures of us — the truck had some kind of camera.

"They finished taking pictures of us, gave the order to stand up, then they took twelve people at a time, counted off twelve to a group, and they lead those twelve people off about forty metres or maybe fifty and order them to lie down like this, facing downhill. (*He shows how.*) Then they rattle away with the machine-gun.

"I happened to be in the second group — the twenty-fourth person. I only remember that I was conscious until they ordered us to lie down. I fell down — didn't even hear the shots when they shot at us lying there. Maybe I even fell asleep. Something happened.

"Later on, when they had shot everyone, old Vasil Lomaka gets up and says: 'Lads, those who are left alive, get up. The Germans have left.'

"My pa was gravely wounded in the stomach, and when he heard this talk, he asks: 'Alyoshka, you're not wounded, are you? Move, won't you...'

"Oh, I forgot, it was right away that I talked to my pa, just after they shot us down, before they went around finishing people off. Pa says to me: 'You alive, sonny?'

"'I'm alive,' I says.

"'You're not wounded?'

"'Nope, doesn't feel that way.'

"'No burning anywhere?'

"'No.'

"And he says: 'Don't budge, they're walking around finishing people off.'

"Five minutes later maybe a German walked up to my head, lifted my head with his foot, and I went like this... (*He shows us.*) And he moved on.

"And only then Vasil Lomaka got up and said: 'Lads, those who are left alive, get up. The Germans have left!'



"I got up and we went among the bodies looking for people who were alive.

"I found my sister, she was seven then. Her leg was shot through below the knee. I carried her off maybe a hundred metres, maybe seventy. Well, I was only a little fellow then, if it were like now... She started to plead that it hurt, that I should put her down, so I put her down and went off with those old men into the woods.

"Well, we walked for two days and nights in the woods. We didn't have anything to eat, but we found a partisans' camp there. We came to that camp, there was a little wheat and a bit of meat there. We took a pot. We were all but naked, see, nobody knew we'd still have long to live. And it was already winter. We found some kind of material for binding our feet, got dressed some, took that wheat and meat, cooked some of it there, and ate it...

"And the next night we decided to go back to our village.

"We came to where I had laid my sister — my sister wasn't there any more. What happened to her — maybe they picked her up and buried her together with the other people, finished her off, or else she died by herself, who knows. She had been lying in the woods, right in the woods, I'd carried her about a hundred metres or maybe less beyond the knoll, she started to plead — and there I laid her down...

"Well, then we took some bread in the village, wherever we found some in people's larders, and some other things, too, meat or something...

"We also went up to the graves, but they were already all filled in. They drove people here from Malaya Volya and filled them in.

"We took food from the village, wherever we found some in people's houses — when you're hungry you don't care whether it's yours or not, so long as it's there — and went off into the woods.

"And I think: I'll go somewhere where there



**Baiki village.
Mikolai Shabunya and his son**



are people, look for people.

"I walked along, and there stood a hayloft, this shed near the swamp. The people that were better off, they put up sheds there and stored hay in them. I went into that hayloft – Boris is lying there wounded. I say to him: 'Boris, what should I do, how can I save you?'"

"He was already about twenty. He says to me: 'Go to Krupitsy, to my sister, tell them to come for me.'"

"Well, so I went along, looking around so's not to run into anyone, and walked all the way to Krupitsy, told them, and they went and fetched him.

"And I stayed there in Krupitsy at my aunt's, my mother's sister..."

Another **Lomaka, Rodion Alexeyevich**, happened to be there in his native Velikaya Volya, having come from Leningrad on vacation.

We found him on the bank of the Shchara with his little daughter Lyuba, who knows and loves her father's village and is always eager to come here with him for fresh milk and naps in the sweet-smelling hay, for walks and swimming in the swift-flowing, picturesque Shchara. Although narrower than the Neva, it is so transparent and warm. And the woods are filled with strawberries, blueberries, and all sorts of mushrooms...

Rodion works in Leningrad as an "on-duty mechanic in the food industry". He moved to the city right after the war, finished a trade school there, and then a technical college.

In that terrible December he was eleven years old, and he, as he says himself, remembers "everything very well".

"...They came, the Germans, gathered everyone and drove them out to the fork in the road. They drew everyone up, first they drove off the men to one side, and then the women and chil-

dren – to a separate side. And they made a film. Then I didn't understand what they were doing, what it was for. They gave the command to raise our hands and filmed us as they liked.

"Then they drove off the first party of men. They left only the women. They killed the men, and then drove off the women and children..."

"How much blood there was there, how much groaning!..."

"I don't know how it turned out so luckily that I wasn't hit by a single bullet, didn't have a single little scratch.

"Everyone is lying there dead, and a German – I remember it as though it were today – is going around with a tommy-gun finishing people off..."

"After some time I got up. And didn't know what to do. I went home even. Then I went to the graveyard again. And there is nobody left in the village any more. I came to the graveyard, and there was one woman still alive there. She took me by the hand and said: 'Let's go into the woods!'"

"We went into the woods. Afterwards we found, the next day, Stas and Vasil Lomaka. There was four of us already. We went on farther. Then we found Stefa Lomaka with little Manya – a twelve-year-old girl. When we found them, they said: 'Ivan Lomaka is lying over there. He's wounded.'"

"That's my own brother.

"We went and dragged him to the partisans' camp, 'under the big fir-tree' as we used to say then. The camp was empty. The wounded man was groaning, his leg was shot through... Afterwards they amputated it.

"We stayed there six days, because the Germans were still cruising around. Then one man said: 'We'll die all the same – let's get along home.'"

"My brother says to me: 'Go home. There's

some vodka there in the hole. I have to rub myself, so I won't freeze.'

"I came home — not a soul. I crawled up, climbed into the hole, but didn't go into the house. I grabbed a couple of bottles of that vodka there — and went back into the woods, to him. I came to him in the woods, and he went and washed his wound there. We spent one more night there, again he says: 'Go have a look, bring something. But be careful.'

"And our houses were in the woods. I crawled up — see some man standing there. I came up closer, had a closer look, and saw it was a relative of ours from Krupitsy. I told him about everything, and he harnessed up the mare and we drove into the woods. We brought my brother to Krupitsy, and there he lay..."

* * *

We drove to the village of Pervomaisk, Rechitsa District, Gomel Region, across the Dnieper, which we admired from the high bridge, and then through fields, meadows and woods, past a few oil derricks — a new feature in these parts.

Outside the windows of **Pavel Markovich Skakun's** house scraggy sunflowers rocked in the wind. On one windowsill lay a pile of ripening tomatoes, and on the other a tom-cat sat licking himself, portending more guests to come, according to the superstition.

Our host, a land improvement specialist, had been summoned for us from work on his ditches. We didn't want to detain him longer than was necessary, but neither did we want to hurry to the detriment of our cause. And he was in no great hurry either.

"...In nineteen forty-three, on the fourteenth of May, a German punitive detachment came first

thing in the morning. Well, I was little, in my twelfth year, I didn't know anything about it... They surrounded the village. We were ploughing, my father, I mean, and I was with the oxen, driving them. The Germans are running around and shouting for us to run into the village. They shoved us, and we went into the village.

"Pa and I come into the village, and there three Germans had already pulled out these big browners, pistols, and were herding people through the village.

"In a jiffy they took pa to load calves onto the wagons. And I went to my mother. There were four of us altogether. I walked along, walked and saw one woman dashing off behind a shed, and a German fired at her and killed her. Over here they're on motorcycles... And that side of the village is burning. And they drove us to that cross-road. They drove us into the yard and decided to split us up. The way they split us up, see, my mother went one way, and I was left there. One woman started to run through the gates, and I went after her, but she says to me: 'Where are you going?' So I didn't go after her, I was scared to.

"Then — into the house. One guy there, this tall fellow, braced himself in the doorway and doesn't let anyone by, so they won't go in there. And a German hits him on the head with that browner. Well, there's nothing I can do, so I slip through that man's legs and into the house. I go in there, and the place is already full of people. They lit a candle in the icon corner — it's the custom in the countryside — and sit there, praying about something, crossing themselves. I don't understand a thing about it. I stood in the corner near the wall because I was alone: I didn't know those people. I knew them, but not well.

"One of the windows was broken and through the window, bluish and like a potato, rolls — a



Pavel Skakun on the site of his burnt-down native village in November 1943.



Pavel Skakun in 1971

grenade. When it burst, you know, it hurled people around. Some it wounded, some it just flung to the side. I was just hit by the air. I was small in height, and so it obviously went higher or something. I was just knocked against the wall and deafened... And then the soot just poured from the chimney – was it dark in the house! – you couldn't see anything. Those people fell down, you know, they're writhing and crawling and shrieking. I see there's a space near the doorway. And I had this shaggy coat, and I went and lay down and covered myself with it.

"I lie there and I hear thump-thump-thump – someone's coming. He began right with me. Bang, you know. And the bullet hit me – right here (*He shows where.*) Three times I heard it bang. There's a noise in my head, I don't remember anything. He shot away in there, shot away...

"I was deafened alright, but not completely, and my eyes could see. I see they're sitting around, saying something. And there was laughter there, too. They mumbled various words in German and Russian. There were three of them. Then, as they were going out, they obviously realized that everybody was stretched out, but I was half bent. And he hit me so hard in the knee with his boot that he cut open my knee. They have iron on the toes. I was as good as done for, I was already expecting the bullet to smack – and that would be the end of me. They muttered something there and went off.

"They set fire to the house from my end, from where I was. The roof was made of straw, and they went and set it on fire from my end, from the doors. The entrance way started to burn, the door started to burn... Then the door fell down on top of me – and it grew scorching hot, I was burning already. I got out from under there, and the flame is already curling around from here, driving me out. At first I wanted to hide under the stove, but

there were all sorts of felt boots there – I might very well burn up there. So I made for the window.

"I hopped out, and those Germans were nearby, about thirty metres away. They were obviously standing and watching. I, you know, jumped through that window that was smashed, where they threw the grenade and – there was a small ditch there – I started to crawl along it. There was a fire-tower there, and I darted behind that fire-tower and then – into the bushes.

"I hadn't yet reached the bridge when a German noticed me and came after me. And two little girls were running on this side of the road. I dived under the bridge, but those little girls went on farther. He killed them, they fell, but I dived under the pilings and lay there, right until evening, in the water. A heavy vehicle drove over and very nearly squashed me. It pressed down on those pilings so...

"When they'd killed us, they sat there for a long time and ger-gerred – fifteen, twenty minutes maybe. And then they went outside and set fire to the house."

QUESTION: "What did they talk about? Did you hear? Could you understand them?"

"Of course not. There was no way you could even turn around there. As soon as you turned a bit, you'd immediately get a bullet, they would stop at nothing, see.

"The people who weren't yet dead were groaning. And as soon as he'd hear it, he'd send a bullet that way...

"When I got up afterwards, I saw how my neighbour was lying, she was holding her little kid like this. There was some kind of chest, and she had tried to find shelter for herself by the chest and is sitting there like this.

"And her husband was propped against the wall, and their son, too, about fifteen he was..."

* * *

When we reached the village of Kharitonovo, Rossony District, Vitebsk Region, we did not find **Pavel Alexandrovich Lazarenko** at home. He had gone sowing.

The district Party committee's chauffeur seemed to know not only all the villages in the district, but also all the houses and all the people living in them. But even he could not at first find the field where these fellows were sowing fodder crops, oats and all. We drove around from copse to copse, got lost and began to track down the sowers by the noise of their tractor. We stopped and through the incessant and zealous twittering of a lark tried to locate where the tractor was rumbling. And then we drove on farther, without having heard or poorly perceiving the roar and not being able to pinpoint where it came from. At first we followed the road, and then cut across country, "like at the front", as the driver, who was under ten during the war, gaily put it. We made our way along the edge of the woods or some approximation of a road, or even simply along the furrows of a potato field, now lengthwise, now crosswise. And we'd stop again and listen... At last we found it – without even being guided by the sound: we simply stumbled upon it, because the tractor happened to be standing silent next to the seed carts.

At our request all superfluous people went off to the side and lowered their voices. We perched our tape-recorder on a cart and switched it on. The recording proceeded not without hitches, also like under "front-line conditions". A sharp wind was blowing after the previous night's rain. Clumps of thin white clouds were scudding over the thicket, the grey-white, wind-swept field, the wet meadows and the freshly-ploughed land we were standing on. The larks were singing closer than ever, a cuckoo was calling louder and longer

than usual, and two lapwings swooped down time after time nearly to the cart itself, uttering their plaintive cry... To make matters worse, Pavel Alexandrovich had been wounded in the mouth, and could not speak distinctly however hard he tried. He was a fine fellow, of the kind who, without even trying, immediately win your liking.

"...Well, it was in nineteen forty-three. We had an active partisan movement. And the Germans were there – tanks and planes and ordnance... And so on February six, nineteen forty-three, the Germans burst upon us, on our district.

"They came here, and people, of course, were in hiding, lots had gone away. Because they already knew they'd have their fun with people.

"And when they came, right away, on the sixth, they gathered all the people in one house. It was crowded there, uncomfortable, in a word, people suffered. Then, the next day, February seventh, they split us up. Into two houses. It was impossible in one.

"They had lists, someone gave them to them, of the partisan families. We had this bathhouse, and they herded people in there. We thought they'd set us on fire. Burn us alive. We had this school-teacher, Drozdova. They simply didn't let her get dressed at home. And it was really cold, a snowstorm. And what do you think – there in the bathhouse she went crazy. She tore all the clothes on her, tore her hair, 'help!' she shouted. In a word, went crazy. Couldn't take it. Afterwards another one, Vladimir Zakharenko – too. In a word, it was bad for us all, everyone was in a bad mood.

"At ten in the morning the doors opened and they say: 'Come out, half of you! You're going to work in Germany.'

"They took us out. Guards all around. You can't go anywhere. They didn't lead us along the

road, but into the field. They led us into the field, there on the field they drew us all up in a row, themselves stepped behind us, well, and started shooting away at us...

"There was my father, me and my brother. My mother wasn't there. Our Mum was in the settlement: the Germans had taken her to the kitchen that morning to sort peas.

"Well then, they put us in a row. Mostly there were old men, there were, probably, seven or eight children. People held the children in their arms. And so when they started to shoot... I don't know how it happened to me. I immediately flew down, my father flew on top of me — they hit him with an explosive bullet in the thigh and his leg was immediately taken away. And my brother tumbled down. And I, when I tumbled down — I lay still right away...

"The old women are crying. One woman was carrying a child, they killed her, and the child is crawling over the snow... A German came up and immediately... Shot him on the spot there.

"It grew a little quieter, you know, the Germans went away, but they left one man on duty. And that German went around and got each person in the head. Shot them. He came up to me, too. But when I tumbled down, my hat fell off my head, partly slid off. He shot, grazed my head with an explosive bullet and shredded my hat to bits, but I was left alive. And one other guy. He still lives here today, in Kharitonovo. Yevgeny Alexandrovich Kazyuchenko. We lay there and lay there until we all but froze. Then his mother got up. She was a religious old woman, started to cross herself..."

QUESTION: "Had that German already left?"

"No, he hadn't. They had a guard on the hill, two machine-guns. When we got up and started to run — they shot at us with the machine-guns. Boy, did they ever fire at us — well... It's good

there were bushes nearby. We ran into the bushes — and continued on through the bushes. We went into the Lesnevsky woods. We walked all night long. Spent the night in the woods. We were both wet and hungry. Where could we go? Where were the partisans, where were the Germans?...

"We went to Miratin, my grandmother lived there. We come there — there's nobody around... First we came to Skuratovo. There some little girls were sitting in one house. We asked them for something to eat but they didn't give us a thing. Because there wasn't anything. And when we entered the village, we saw a burnt-up shed with bodies in it: meaning they'd herded them into the shed and set them on fire...

"And then I got to Miratin, my grandmother lived there, and there I lay up for six months."

QUESTION: "And how many, could you tell us, were there of you lying there dead?"

"In our group there were twenty-three, and the other group was — twenty-two.

"Well, that's all. As for what happened there at home — I didn't see myself. They shot my mother and my brother. They took them outside the settlement and bayoneted them. Their faces were all covered with stabs... And my father, when he was running away... He was alive, only his leg was torn off, then they came and shot him in the head with an explosive bullet. There wasn't anything left — his whole head..."

"And the kids, the little children — shot in the head, it was frightful to look at..."

At that tragic time, Pavel Lazarenko was not a young boy, as we had just been told in the village, but already a youth, as became clear at the very end of his account, when we heard that he had been wounded in the mouth and "everything there was smashed up" at the front in Germany, and that then in Kharitonovo he had been

wounded differently.

We decided to include his story in this chapter as a necessary introduction to what **Yevgeny Alexandrovich Kazyuchenko**, who was fourteen at the time, told us afterwards.

Yevgeny became a labour and war invalid at the same time, when, already six years after the end of the war, his tractor hit an anti-tank mine. "The tractor was smashed completely," he said, "and me, see – my leg and arm..."

We found him at home and taped him there.

"...It was in nineteen forty-three, on February eighth. They came to our village, right here. And I had a brother with the partisans. And so because of my brother they put me and my mother under execution.

"The whole population was herded together into two houses. They summoned the partisan families from one house, summoned them from the other and separated us all off.

"You'll be going to the Germans in the rear, you'll look after the cattle."

"He said that so the people wouldn't get nervous. But as it turned out, they weren't planning to send us to their rear to watch the cattle, but gathered us all in the bathhouse. There were exactly forty-five people. They locked us up in the bathhouse, set a sentry, and then a German officer came and counted, he was evidently checking if it was exact. He walked out of the bathhouse, and the Germans came and ordered us out.

"Well, we went out, they encircled us. The snow was real deep then... And they drove us onto the hill. To shoot us. There were children there, and old men and old women. Young boys. All sorts of people.

"They took us beyond the hill and drew us up into one line. When they had drawn us up, the Germans then stepped back... Six Germans did

the shooting then. They shot with rifles. Well, they stood about three steps behind us in a line and began to shoot. Five or so shots rang out and I look: someone fell over there, someone else over there... So they weren't shooting them in order.

"My mother was standing right there. I was about fourteen then. I pushed my mother into the snow then and myself realized there was no point in standing: those that were standing they killed. I fell and turned so as to sink deeper into the snow, and sank right in...

"Well, as for those who were standing, they killed them all.

"When they had killed them, everything grew quiet, but all the same it was scary to lift your head. Then it turned out that five of the Germans had gone, and one they'd left. They shot the people from behind, and people fell forward. And he walked in front and started, that SS man, to kill people for the second time round. He reloaded his rifle three times. The rifle had five cartridges. And I watched that. And I knew that there were five cartridges in the rifle... My hands froze, it was very cold, some thirty degrees below Centigrade, or even thirty-five. My arms were stretched out, he stepped between my arms – only grazed them with his overcoat... Well, and he went on.

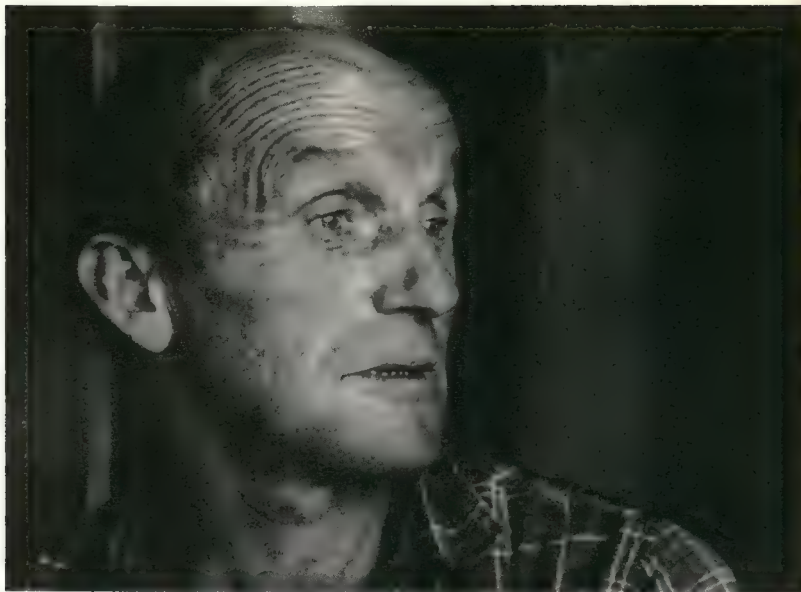
"But all the same we were afraid to raise our heads.

"Then I heard *our* talk. And my head seemed to jump up by itself. And it was my neighbour who turned out to be alive. His brother was alive, and his pa was alive. His pa was wounded in the leg.

"Then we started to discuss whether his pa should go or stay lying where he was... But you couldn't lie there the whole day: it was very cold. Let's run away.

"And they had a machine-gun on the hill: they were protecting themselves so the partisans wouldn't attack. Lazarenko ran off ahead. Then

Carpenter
Mikolai Bogdanovich



I said to my mother: 'You run after me!'

"And I started to run away. When I first tried to get up, my legs had already got numb from cold — I couldn't run away, so I crawled along on all fours about six or seven metres — my legs started to work and I stood up. I had only run off about ten metres when they noticed me. A machine-gun and two Germans were there. And they immediately started to fire away at me with the machine-gun... There were these reeds there, bushes. When I'm not running, they don't shoot, as soon as I get up, start to move — they shoot. I ran away somehow, they didn't kill me.

"But Lazarenko's father was wounded in the leg, and he didn't get away. And his little brother, when we ran away, he crawled off and came here to the village. Lazarenko's little brother. And that guy who drew up the lists, sold the partisan families to the Germans, he saw that 'a shot partisan had gone by' and told the Germans that the little brother was left and the mother was left. She was sorting some peas for the soldiers — the Germans made her. They picked up that boy and his mother, took them over here beyond the vegetable garden and killed them."

QUESTION: "Who was that foul creep?"
"He was — the Germans came two days later and killed the whole family."

QUESTION: "What was his last name?"
"He himself was killed, too. But what his last name was — really and truly, I don't remember. Veriga, I think."

QUESTION: "And was your mother also left alive?"

"My mother was left. She lived twelve more years, and then she died.

"In nineteen forty-four I enrolled in the courses for tractor drivers and then worked as a tractor driver until nineteen fifty-one, until I ran into that mine... Well, and now I'm an invalid, I help on the state farm, do whatever I can..."

★ ★ ★

We found **Mikola Mikhailovich Bogdanovich** on the construction site of a new meat-packing plant in Slutsk. The forty-three-year-old carpenter's shift had just ended, and behind the closed doors of the superintendent's cabin,

through whose board walls we could hear the din of the building site, he told us how he had got away from his native village of Gandarevo as it was being consumed by flames.

"...We all happened to be in the house. Mother was putting food on the table when the Germans swooped down on the village. Nobody had time to run away anywhere.

"A German came to the house and said: 'Mother, go drive out the cow!...'

"She went, and he got out a pistol and killed her. Before my eyes. In the shed. And then he went back to the house. And I hid in the yard.

"I had a brother. He was older than me. He was already undressed, lying in bed as though he were sick – so they wouldn't take him to Germany – and he went and shot him in bed. He took my younger brother from the stove... He also killed my little sister... And went out of the house.

"And I ran in afterward, picked up my younger brother, Vanya, and – started to run away with him.

"We ran out of the house together, and I also ran into the shed to look at Mummy. I thought: if my brother's alive, well, maybe they didn't hit Mummy either...

"My brother ran straight into the woods, and they caught up with him. Shot him in the arm above the elbow and in the head... They found him there later on.

"But I didn't run away, I hid in a little passage-way between two sheds. Uncle's shed and ours. I sit there. But later on, when the sheds began to burn, I thought they'd collapse and crush me... I crawled out of there and raced from one side to the other. But they noticed me. They were driving from the direction of T'ikhan, a neighbouring village. And they sent one after me. I see him com-

ing... I think they don't see me. And then he stuck his head out from behind a corner, and I stuck mine out from behind a corner. And I called to him: 'Sir! Sir!' and threw this... excuse me, frozen piece of horse shit at him from around the corner. And myself ran into my yard, jumped over the well, the fence and dashed farther down the street..."

QUESTION: "And he slipped and fell, the German? That's what your sister told us."

"He slipped. Well, maybe he thought I hurled a grenade. The devil only knows what he thought, but it's a fact that that happened. He fell, and in the meantime I reached the third yard... And then crawled on all fours, on my hands and knees, behind the potato mounds... The collective-farm stables stood there, and it was about five hundred metres from those stables to the woods. The snow had melted because of the fire, there was lots of snow – I just couldn't run. I crawled and crawled, and then I sprang up and took to my heels. Where the snow was already hard. I reached the forest and then it was just like someone had hit me in the back of the head – all went black before my eyes... They had wounded me in one leg and in the other. Later I came to and hear them shooting...

"People bandaged me up in Starevo, and then I went off into the woods..."

Mikolai Mikhailovich is not a talkative person, and we had to encourage him to speak with questions and inquiries. He is also a shy person, and had not the slightest intention of telling about the frozen "grenade" with which he, a mere boy, had frightened a grown-up with shoulder-straps and a Tommy-gun. If his sister Zonya Mikhailovna, whom we had visited before him, had not mentioned it to us, he himself, as he said, "would have been embarrassed to..."

Two Old Ages

by J. H. H. H. H.

1911

1911

1911

1911

1911

1911

1911

1911

1911

1911

1911

1911

1911

1911

1911

1911

1911

1911

1911

1911

1911

1911

1911

1911

1911

1911

1911

1911

1911

1911

"His head aches..."

We had a whole week's break, during which we lived at home and were filled with the cares and joys of daily life, so that now, out of domestic inertia, we took in the sunny, green June day without that deep and fearful undercurrent of people's memories of blood and fire.

We reached the village of Olkhovka, Klichev District, Mogilyov Region, and hurried from our vehicle to the house we needed, where a little old man was sitting on a bench outside the front garden. He was a quiet, faded little old man, with white hair. And in spite of the heat he was sitting not in the shade, but right in the sun. We greeted him and he didn't respond, asked him a question, but he remained silent. It was not rudeness, because he gave us a look full of friendliness or innocence. He didn't smile — he just glanced at us unhurriedly and indifferently, and again looked off somewhere into the distance ahead.

He could not have been watching for something, or pondering, or even simply feasting his eyes on the view he had seen for so many years — all three occupations require some kind of activity, but this little old man was just looking. Just sitting there and looking...

Realizing, or rather sensing, that he was not the person to help us, we went to the gate. Still in the yard, we were met by a vivacious and affable old lady. Quickly grasping what we needed, she invited us into the house, not bothering to call her husband in from the street.

The house was clean and bare inside, and without asking we could guess that, like in many fairy tales, the old man and his wife lived all by themselves.

The old woman seated herself at the table and, like most of the people we'd already met either in their houses or in the field, didn't pay any atten-

tion to the microphone — she was simply telling people, that's all.

"...What's my name, you say? Tsmyg, **Gripina Pavlovna Tsmyg**. And how old am I? I'm already, lads, two more years and then I'll be eighty. Oh, I've been living for a lo-ong time already, oh me, oh my!... (*She laughs.*) And he, my husband, is already completely... He's older than me. Maybe thirteen or fourteen years. His name is Amelyan Atrafimov Tsmyg. And my other old man was also Amelyan, my first husband. This old fellow was a widower, he had fifteen of his folk killed by the Germans, they're lying in that pit. But he was left alive, this old fellow was.

"Well, I was left a widow. My son was with the partisans. And he, this old fellow, was the godfather of my other old man's child. And he says: 'You know what, let's be together, the two of us.'

"And I says: 'All right, let's.'

"My son came home from the woods, and I asked: 'Thus and so, sonny, what shall I do?'

"Mummy, if you have someone to lean on here, then you just go ahead and stay here. Maybe I'll come over when I need you to give me foot bindings or change my shirt.'

"Well, and so we got together with the old fellow, and we've been living together for maybe thirty years. Not in our village any more, not in Susha, but here.

"And now his head aches...

"The old fellow and the lads had gathered in a flock — it was Sunday. And the women had got all dressed up, old and young. They're sitting all together somewhere. Well, and then, you know, the old fellow is standing in the shack, and that woman, his first wife, goes and says: 'They're gathering people for a meeting! Go on over there, hubby.'



“‘I’ll hide.’

“And she says: ‘Why should you hide?’ – It’s us women are so stupid. – ‘What should you hide for – everyone has gone to the meeting.’

“Well, if he had to, he had to. All those women and young lads... And there already weren’t any houses – just shacks. The houses were burnt. Dug-outs there were. The old fellow wanted to hide in the dug-out under the bunk, but she didn’t let him.

“Then those Germans said: ‘Those three people there: that man, that one and that one (they were pretty old already: the young people had been driven into captivity), three people are

needed to herd the cows. Drive them over to the stream, into the meadow, and graze them. And then herd them to Kirovsk. And if there are no cows, there won’t be any of you either!...’

“The old fellow told me all this when we got together with him.

“So they herded them to Kirovsk.

“And they, the Germans, drew them up in a line, those people that were left. For the meeting. There were two settlements. Less than a kilometre apart – this settlement and that settlement. And they drove them from here and from there, and in the middle was a potato field. They dug up a pit, got it all ready. And they stood them in

"... And when they buried them in that pit, the earth, they said, was breathing like this, breathing, breathing! ... That's what the carters said. They dug them up later. Maybe a hundred and fifty of these ... skulls... And after that his head started to ache, my old man's. He just doesn't know anything at all..."

Gripina Tsmyg about her husband Amelyan



a row, and aimed the mashing-guns. And then they started counting off: 'This many people and this many people!...' And made them run into the pit. The carters told about that.

"And one man from Gorodets couldn't take it, who had come as a carter — he couldn't take it and died.

"They drove the people into the pit, massed them in the pit, and then he rattles away with the mashing-gun, rattles away. And the women go and... they start to wail and bind themselves up like this, and then jump into the pit. Throw themselves in. After binding their faces up with their scarves...

"They dug them up later. Maybe a hundred and fifty of those... skulls...

"And when they buried them in that pit, the earth, they said, was breathing like this, breathing, breathing!... That's what the carters said. The Khvedotovs' brother-in-law happened to be one of them. And he said: 'Every part of me just went numb.' He died, that man, died of it, couldn't take it.

"After me and my old man had got together, we looked and looked for his kin for about a week. We hear some kind of swarm humming... But that's not a swarm of bees, but all flies, gadflies... And they had buried them like this — here's the road, and they're near the road, close by in this... Well, big potato field... That old man of mine and three or four others say: 'Let's go and dig them up. We'll bury them separately.' They dug them up. When someone would take hold of an arm, the skin would just all peel off. They'd rotted. Well, so some said they should take them out, but my old man says: 'I'm not going to touch them — just let them lie where they are.'

"And we added some more earth on top there and put up a little fence around...

"And after that his head started to ache, my old

man's. He just doesn't know anything at all. My dear lads, how can we go on living like this? I have to buy everything, and look after him like a small child..."

That's a fairy tale for you — that isn't one about an old man and his wife.

The sun is shining, children and birds are twittering outside, the whole world is filled with the presence of summer, and here, inside, the kind old woman, a while back so bright and gay, is crying, and the quiet, faded little old man with white hair sits looking in front of him... Just looking and not seeing anything, it seems.

If that's really so, it's good that at least he doesn't also see the swarm of forest flies and the disinterred grave with all his kin, with all his village — that he doesn't see what made "his head ache".

Forever.

Bakanikha—a village or a farm?

It was a long and arduous way to Bakanikha. We might never have got there at all had it not been for our driver and our guide. Pavel Vashchenko, the district Party committee chauffeur, was an energetic, fun-loving man somewhat under forty, who might well have got his land-rover to jump over a fence. Our guide, whom Pavel picked up in the last village before the start of the trackless forest, was Anton Matsievich, a former partisan and soldier now working as a combine operator. He not only told our driver what route to take, but himself led us into the green maze. He was a calm and deliberate man, of the kind that don't talk much.

We were in Rossony District, Vitebsk Region,

where there is a lake at the foot of every knoll, followed by another knoll, a bit of field, some woods, and another lake. There are a hundred and eighty lakes in this one district. It used to be a "desert zone". Now, thirty years after the war, there are still only a little more than half as many inhabitants as there were before it started... It is a wonderful area, a land of courageous partisans and thousands of innocent martyrs...

In one of the clearings of the marshy forest beyond which, on the very border of Byelorussia and Russia, Bakanikha was supposed to be, our guide once more explained to the driver which way to go and how, and himself got out of the car, went off somewhere and disappeared. Again making its way into a thicket, our rover snorted and roared and choked, winding along the semblance of a forest track now turned into a mire after the abundant rains, and sometimes even breaking itself a path through virgin territory. Then Comrade Vashchenko, as someone might have said, overdid it a bit: he shot into a suspicious-looking pit-hole, gunned the motor, jerked back and forth a few times, and got utterly bogged down. As someone with more of a sense of humour might have said, only our antenna was visible. And then, like some kind forest spirit, our guide suddenly popped out of the green depths of the forest. We calmly began to consider what best to do... A couple of hours later we got out of the hole, washed ourselves off a bit in sunny lake Glyba, a welcome sight after our trouble in the thicket, then drove into another thicket and nearly got stuck again, but all the same soon made it to a big clearing.

Until the winter of 1942-1943, a village stood in this clearing. Now only one of the forty-one farmsteads is left, on a little knoll next to the forest. Between it and the opposite edge of the forest where we stopped to take pictures, a little brook with a footbridge flowed through a low valley, in

which stood two abandoned cowsheds and a hay-loft. They were built shortly after the war and used to belong to a collective farm, but are no longer of use to the state farm with which the former merged. The centre of the state farm is rather far from here, beyond the lake which lies shimmering to the south.

What would you call Bakanikha – a village or a farm?...

The man we had come to see, **Arkhip Tikhonovich Zhigachov**, was in his yard, stacking some split logs next to the barn. We already knew something about him, but the main thing was to be found here, starting with his fingerless hands, which after they got burnt grew together in a clump... All the same, at eighty-four, the old man is still lively, and even cheery.

Ours was not the first such request he had had, and, taking off his cap once inside the house, he sat down in a dignified way at the table and began his tale, saying to get started:

"...Just let me get my thoughts together...

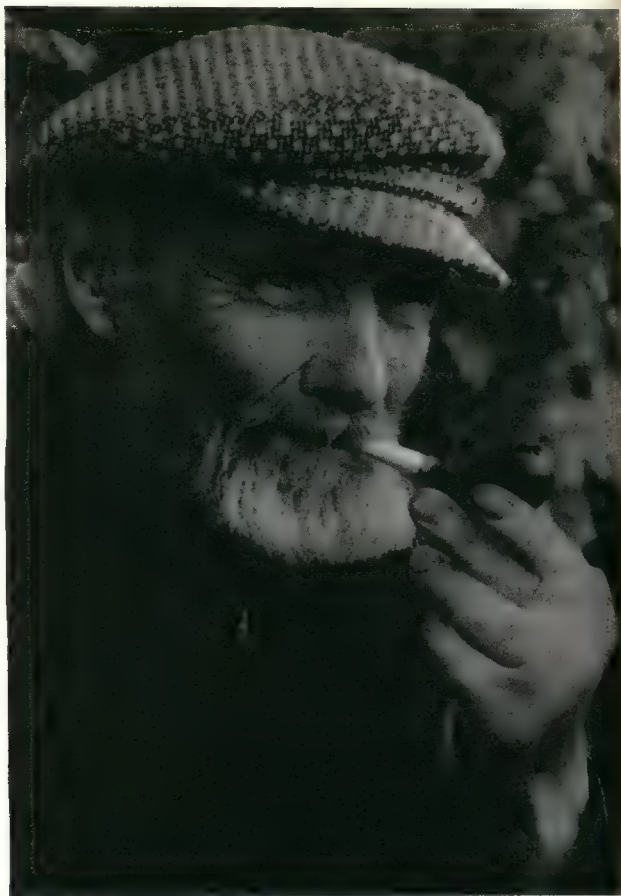
"...When the German detachment came here, we were taken to the village of Mamolya. And on the morning of the day they burnt our village, we had gone to Lopatki, and from there we saw that Zausvetye was burning. We didn't tarry there, but went back to our village. Here, to Bakanikha.

"As soon as I got to my flat, the women gathered and asked where we were. And I look and see a policeman running through my yard. And he's wrapping these trousers around his back: my trousers had been thrown out in the orchard. He'd taken them for himself.

"And then we were immediately given the command to gather, the whole village, in one flat. And they gathered us, sixty-four people, where the monument now stands. One policeman ran and

"That pipe has already been in many pictures."

Arkhip Zhigachev



ordered everyone to go there. Not to some meeting, he just said: 'Go to that house.'

"They drove us there, and then the carters and policemen drove out our cattle. They herded it away beyond the village.

"When we had gathered in that one flat, a German officer came in and started to examine who was wearing what. If it was a good sheepskin coat or felt boots, they made the person take them off and throw them outside, and there the carters picked them up. Then the officer went and bade farewell to us. He says: 'Goodbye. Thank those partisans of yours.'

"And what he said that for, I didn't understand.

"As soon as he said that, they closed up the flat and threw grenades in at us through the two windows. Those grenades hissed for a long time. If there had been some daring person, he could have thrown them back out. Well, all right. The grenades exploded and many people perished, but everyone recoiled to one side. Then they fired at that heap with a tommy-gun. When they stopped shooting with the tommy-gun, a lot of people were still alive. People smashed one window and started to leap out of the window. The policemen



shot those who jumped out of the window. They stood all around the flat.

"They set it on fire. The ceiling crumbled. I see there's nowhere for me to go... My neighbour and I hid across from that window under the couch. Aha. They didn't see us then. Then my neighbour, Fyodor Lukyanovich, says: 'I'll look out of the window, maybe they're gone off.'

"He had just got up when they hit him with a bullet here, in the forehead and he slumped down backwards.

"And I lie there. The ceiling has already begun to crumble. Then I see I can't lie there any long-

er — I braced myself against the pier to jump out of the window, and the pier collapsed. Then I leapt into the snow — the snow was deep near the flat. And right away the skin came off my arms. Then I crawled away a bit and lie there. And my jacket keeps on burning and burning from the middle. I rub it with snow. The Germans were walking around. When I rubbed it off I lay quiet. And they had already all gone away.

"A buddy of mine was lying there. Akhrem Burnasenko was his name. And they had shot him with a bullet. And they had nicked the surface right here along the rib — not hurt him much. He

got away to the fence, lay down and goes on lying there. And the Germans, when they passed along the road saw that he was moving — one German came and shot him here at point-blank range with his rifle. The bullet went through like this. I went up to him — after they had already all gone away — and he says to me: 'What are you walking around here for, they'll see you.'

"He was still alive. There was just blood here.

"There was this Pashkov, the teacher here, he moved off a ways like this, crawled off, and was left safe and sound.

"Then Pashkov and I went into a barn here to spend the night. And we left him, Akhrem, as he was. And he then got up and — there was this barn that we dried crops in — he clambered into that stove and lay there for three days. And Pashkov and I went to Perevoz. To Zavshcha, that is... Pashkov had a sister left there in Zavshcha, she took him to Perevoz. And I lived at an old woman's for three days.

"Well, and the old woman says: 'It's as you like — either you leave the flat, or we'll leave, I'm afraid of the Germans.'

"So I went away from there. I came out onto the lake, my eyes all swelled up, couldn't see nothing. I'd raise my eyelids like this and look — I'm going in the wrong direction. My face was all burned up, see, and my head was burned. And all the same I came back here, got to my village.

"Some people had already come back from retreat. These kids were already there. One of them, Pyotr Medvedev. They took me in. And we stayed there. Then my daughter came. Only one flat out of the whole settlement was left. We gathered in that flat then. My sister took me for treatment, I was at my sister's for a month. Even more. She treated me there with sunflower seed oil, wrapped me up in rags. And so it all soon healed...

And then after that...

"I don't know what more to say..."

QUESTION: "Did they take only you from your house?"

"My whole family. I had a wife, and a daughter of fourteen, and there was also a little boy Kolya, one and a half he was. And those they all sterilized there. And I also had this other son, and a daughter. My son was with the partisans, and my daughter had retreated with the partisans, she came back about four days later.

"Now we live here alone. This is our house."

QUESTION: "So you don't ever want to leave here?"

"No. I was born here, and I plan to live here to the end of my days..."

The power of life, you may call it, the pull of one's native soil, or, if you will, even an affirmation of victory. I was here, I am here, and I shall be here as long as I want.

Before the war Arkhip Tikhonovich worked on the collective farm as a groom and a team leader, and after the war served as a forest ranger. He has been on pension for years now, but he still bustles about, in accordance with the age-old folk notion of duty. He has to help around the farm, look after his grandson, and he also has to tell people about what happened, so that those who don't know what fascists are might know. People have already come to him here several times and even taken him by helicopter to Vitebsk, where, as he says, "the whole region heard me on the radio".

After our conversation and a hospitable snack, we all sat down on the bench in front of the house to rest before our difficult trip back to Rossony. Arkhip Tikhonovich puffed away on a pipe. Just one more picture, it might come in handy. The old man did not pose for the photograph, he just

sat there smoking, but in the end could not resist saying, as if about someone else: "That pipe has already been in many pictures."

The old man lives, and lives quite well on the whole, though at times not quite swimmingly... His wife, Tatyana Ivanovna, is a good-natured Russian who was also orphaned and widowed in the war and speaks good Byelorussian. His son from his first wife, who was with the partisans, and his daughter-in-law live with them. Life for the harmonious family would be utterly grand were it not for a great misfortune it shares, a misfortune

no one is to blame for in this case. The younger couple's adolescent son and Arkhip Tikhonovich's only grandson, Vasil, is gravely ill. As if the old man hadn't already lived through enough as it is... Why only the old man? It is a great misfortune for everyone, but Arkhip Tikhonovich still serves as the boy's nanny to this day. Because everyone else, even his wife, who is much younger than he, goes to work each day on the state farm, and the old man is left with Vasil.

But even this misfortune does not weigh down the old fellow.

Knyazhevodtsy

Chance brought us to the village of Knyazhevodtsy, Mosty District, Grodno Region, on July 23, the anniversary of its tragedy. The day was, perhaps, just as it had been twenty-eight years before, sultry and enervating. The air quivered under the hot rays, the ears of grain stood bent in the fields and the old oak trees seemed to doze in the sun. One felt irresistibly drawn to the thick shade under their spreading crowns.

The burnt pear trees in the former yards of the once large village sent up shoots from their roots, and these suckers have already become new trees. Wild fruit-trees languish in the sun, pining for human presence and the houses, granaries, haylofts and barns they should be growing near, for the sparrows which should be chirping and rustling in their foliage, tussling with each other to the amusement of the clucking hens, stealing grain from them and taunting cats on the prowl with their cheekiness.

Only one farmstead rose from the ashes on the site of the former village — one out of two hundred. It is a simple wooden house, which somehow turned black, perhaps from the memory of the black sorrow on which it stands. Next to it a tall, white birch stretches up toward the sky as though it wanted to break away from the earth and the horror of the fiery nightmare the house's inhabitants so often talk about.

The little boy who comes here from Grodno every summer on vacation on the banks of the Niemen doesn't play with anyone in the wild orchards, because there isn't anybody to play with. The black dog Bars is his only friend. When he comes back from fishing in the morning, he busies himself with some affairs of his own inside the house and only rarely fools around with Bars.

Ganna Andreyevna Borodavka, an elderly woman in a black house-coat and white kerchief tied under her chin, was standing on her doorstep.

She looked like a nun with her wrinkled face, dry, parched lips and troubled eyes, which had seen death at such close range.

Death stood over two people hiding in the nettles, a woman and her husband. Death was wearing a mouse-coloured greatcoat, a tiger-striped cloak and a green helmet.

That's how this woman saw it, and it is from her that her nephew must have learned to imagine death in just this form. He models hosts of figurines from brown-green plasticine. Those of nazis he makes drawn-out, as if deliberately in the manner of old Gothic masters, and they come out from under his fingers elongated and looking like some kind of humanoid worms...

He busied himself in this manner while his aunt told her story, after inviting us into the house.

"...They kept saying all the time that they'd kill the people of Knyazhevodtsy, but we never believed it. And then one day my mother-in-law got up and said: 'Get up, Knyazhevodtsy is already surrounded.'

"We got up and looked out the window — Germans are standing one next to the other, as close as from one wall to the other. My husband says: 'I'll go hide somewhere, I'll go as if to cut grass for the horse...'

"I didn't even ask him where I should go, what I should do.

"Later I went outside, started to look for him and didn't find him anywhere. I walk along softly calling to him. And he says: 'Go on, go on, don't stop. I'm lying in the nettles here. Go,' he says, 'toward the house, lie down in the furrow and crawl over here to me.'

"And I crawled up to him like that. We lay down with our heads together and didn't move...

"And, lying in the furrow, I heard people com-

"Seryozha, can you model birds or animals, or ordinary people? The boy was silent."



ing. One neighbour started to cry, but they didn't shout at her, just kept saying something softly to her. And then they went in to my mother-in-law, I heard them take her, my mother-in-law. Then another German, when he had taken away my mother-in-law, said in German: 'I'll go farzuchan.'*

"He went into the house, looked around and left.

"Then they drove people over from neighbouring villages – to take our goods, what was left. They drove out the cows.

"Our cow came up, stood over us and snuffles. And we're afraid someone might notice why she stopped here. Then those people that were with shovels came and drove away the cow, but didn't notice us.

"My Anton says: 'They went to bury people.'

"And we still just can't believe it. We hear them taking everything from our house, how they took the chaff-cutter in the yard, the plough. They looked for the harrow. Then they drove away, even-

* *Farzuchan* (distorted German *versuchen*) – to try, here in the sense of to look for.

rything grew quiet again, and we thought that everything had calmed down already. But then there was shooting, shooting, shooting!... They shot with a machine-gun, and just one shot at a time, and with tommy-guns. We lie there, and then we see – it's burning, everything's burning! Our house is already burning, and the neighbours behind us are burning...

"One of our neighbours, Mikolai Kovsh, had dropped by on us earlier one evening, and he says: 'If they start burning us sometime, I'll crawl in under the stove. They'll set the house on fire, and when it's all up in flames then I'll hop out in the smoke and run away, and everything will be okay.'

"Later he did just that. When they set all the houses on fire, the Germans started to say something near the house where he had hidden under the stove. Because that's what they did: they'd set a house on fire and stand around it, waiting. Kovsh crawled under the stove, and the Germans set his house on fire and stood there. Then he ran out of the fire, and they caught him. That's what people from the other villages said, who were carters. He was wearing rubber boots; the Germans



Ganna Borodavka, Seryozha's aunt

ordered him to take them off. He pulled one off, he pulled off the other, and then they shot him in the head from behind. People said he was buried in that big pit, together with everyone else, but to the side.

"They stood near the houses until everything burnt down to the ground. How could you stay sitting in there, in that furnace!...

"They were all in German uniform, in capes, these striped capes, and in helmets, all of them.

"That was on the twenty third of July, exactly today. It was even a Friday, too. In 'forty-three..."

The boy listened to the old woman's story, a true story more frightening than any fairy-tale, and his nimble fingers mechanically modelled lanky, brown-green nazi soldiers standing next to machine-guns, or riding in vehicles or on self-propelled guns. It grew crowded for them on the tabletop. Like some rampant locusts they stuck to each other, twined around one another, like a knot of snakes near an uprooted stump writhing in be-

witched frenzy.

"Is that your grandson?" we asked the old lady.

"No, Seryozha is my nephew from Grodno, he came for the summer."

"Seryozha, can you model birds or animals, or ordinary people?"

The boy was silent.

"It's boring for the child all by himself," said the old woman, trying either to excuse or to come to the rescue of her nephew.

In her voice could be heard longing for the people who once inhabited this big and bustling village, for the lively young scamps who could ransack all the kitchen gardens, go swimming fifteen times a day and still have time to pasture the horses, cows and geese... She misses her neighbours, free and easy Niemen raftsmen, who put their whole heart into both work and play.

That kind of life could have flowed on as leisurely and unhampered as the broad Niemen, which is deep here in its middle course. It could have...

Through the heat-haze one can make out the Niemen's banks, overgrown with willow bushes. Apparently the Lithuanian grand dukes had

a ford here on the way to Volkovysk and Berestye from Vilno, and the people who guarded and serviced the dukes' crossing were given the name of ducal conveyers, or *knyazhevodtsy* in Russian.

Few people remember anything about those distant times. The stories they tell relate to the more recent past.

There is a local legend about the cathedral in the nearby village of Dubno, another large village, which, however, escaped destruction during the war. The huge, ponderous cathedral seems to stare through the gaps in its rusted cupolas without being able to grasp what happened. In sight of it was the big village of Knyazhevodtsy, but it was all reduced to ashes, nothing of it is left. The church's loud bells once pealed the power and will of god, the tsar and the Polish landowners over the Niemen lands, but now they are silent. The world follows a mysterious pattern, and the building of the cathedral was somewhat of a miracle too. People say the tsar ordered a church to be erected in the Ukrainian city of Dubno, but the people who carried out his will somehow got confused and modified his command, taking the church onto a Byelorussian village of the same name.

Like everywhere else in the world, there was another will in the Niemen region, a good and radiant will, the will to live. It issued from the earth, the working people and their need to create; it was the embodiment, the reasonable manifestation, of life and freedom. Under the influence of the life-giving force of light and freedom and of their aspiration to it, peasant poets were born here in this enchanting locality. Like skylarks over a field, they sang hymns to life and creation and appealed to the people of the Niemen area, in the words of the great Byelorussian poet Yanka Kupala, to be worthy of the name People. The voices of these bards did not carry far, but the people in these

parts listen to their songs as they do to the beating of their own heart. The sincere, modest and poignant voice of the poet Mikhas Vasilyok sounded not far from here in the days of bondage and struggle, while somewhat lower down the river and considerably earlier in time, the noble Pole Eliza Orzeszkowa found her immortal images among the oppressed Byelorussian peasants.

Three farmsteads standing at a distance from what was once Knyazhevodtsy were left intact in the grain-bearing valley beyond the pine forest at the edge of the lands once sown by the inhabitants of the large village.

Here we found **Symon Ivanovich Kaya** squatting next to a tombstone, engrossed in covering with a coating of bronze paint the traditional letters "H. L." — "Here lies" — cut into the stone. This kind of work became a second profession as it were for the tiller of the land after the nazi pogrom. There is something awfully symbolic in the combination of circumstances. The peasant who by some miracle escaped his own death and experienced the death of his friends and relatives cannot get away from the presence of death. It is always next to him.

But it is not death that dictates the words "Here lies", it is not death that urges the peasant to carve the letters "H. L." on the gravestone. Life dictates them, because memory is an attribute of life. What does Symon Kaya, this old servitor of life, think during his long days of slow and painstaking labour? What does he think about those whose memory he is preserving in gilt letters? Perhaps he tells the shadows and these stones he works on about the events of that day, which set him apart from the living without joining him with the dead.

"...When that happened I, you know, had come home from a wedding, from Sukhinichi, and lay down to sleep in the hayloft. For some reason I slept poorly that night. It had only just begun to get a little light when I got up. I came to my house, knocked on the window, but my wife was sound asleep, I was hardly able to wake her up. I went into the house, it had already got a little light. My wife went out into the yard, and I'm still walking around in the house. Of course, I'd come from a wedding, my head's buzzing... My daughter who was seventeen was sleeping on one bed, the second, on another..."

"I look and see my wife quickly running back.

"Hurry," she says, 'there are Germans beyond the kitchen-gardens and they're shouting "halt!"'

"Well, you know, they'd come to us several times from Grodno. They'd collect a truck-load of people and drive away with them. Not to work. They beat them there, so they'd tell about the partisans... They'd beat the senses out of a person, and he'd tell them what they needed..."

"They started to encircle our village. Each of them walked along about fifty metres and stayed put. A few of our houses that were on separate farms stood beyond the cordon. Mine did, too. At first they passed us by, but then a group of Germans detached itself and came to drive us out of our houses. Then I jumped out the window and beat it to the Niemen..."

"When they shot them, I was close to that grave, in the forest. There was no screaming at all. Only a volley. And separate shots. I went off farther away from that shooting..."

"This one guy from Lunnaya, who was a carter then, told me about it. He died, that guy. He was near the grave. They ordered those people, the carters, to drag those that were shot and fell not in the grave, but near the grave, to drag them into the pit. That guy couldn't utter a word for four

days. Didn't regain his senses. Only afterwards he got back his memory. And told what happened there..."

"They were all in German uniform. They sat around after it all, after they'd shot the people, and ate the salt pork and sausage that they'd robbed..."

A cold shiver runs down your spine when Symon Kaya's eyes rest on you with a distracted, unseeing look, and the carefree smile of a child plays on his lips. At last an expression of grief appears on his face, and his listener gives a sigh of relief — he's all right, he's still all right... Peacetime was unable to erase the shock this man experienced, and the once hardworking breadwinner never recovered from it. The war came to an end, but he continued to wander from village to village, neither a mendicant nor a working man proper. He somehow hit upon his present occupation, which is not quite a trade, nor just a way to make money. Is it punishment or payment for his having survived?

Symon Kaya will never return from the boundary-land between life and death where he was hurled after that drunken night following the wedding in Sukhinichi and the next morning when his native village was encircled by the Germans. He will not yield to the temptation of petty worldly cares, he will not grin at people as inquisitively, cordially and gaily as his neighbour, **Mokrina Ivanovna Kovalchuk.**

A retired collective farmer, Mokrina Ivanovna lives all alone on the next farmstead, but her kitchen-garden has enough potatoes, beans, poppies and other vegetables to feed a goodly family. She potters about in it like an old herb-woman, eagerly looking forward to the visit of her children and grandchildren from the city and the way she will be able to surprise them with treats from her



luxuriant crop.

Old Mokrina is short, and the poppies in her garden come over her head. She affectionately refers to the tall cereals that envelop her little farm and call them, after her own fashion, "ryne".

It is this "ryne" that saved her life and that of her children.

On that July day in nineteen forty-three, Mokrina Kovalchuk led her five children into the thickly-growing rye, plunged into its depths and disappeared for a few days, like a mother partridge with her brood.

"...Today just happens to be the same date as then, when they killed us...

"My man was called Zmitruk. They killed him, my husband...

"I woke up the older children, and then I says to myself: 'Run over to the neighbours.' My neighbour was older, she was sixty. I ran over to her and says: 'Auntie, the Germans are already surrounding us! We've got to run away.'

"But she says: 'We have to hide something.'

"And I says: 'We don't need anything, let's just run away. Let's run into the ryne or somewhere...'

"But she doesn't listen and says to her son: 'You run away, sonny, and I'll hide something.'

"I ran home, and my children were standing on the covered porch and said: 'Both Daddy went away and Mummy went away, we already thought you'd left us.'

"I took the four oldest, but my littlest daughter was sleeping on the bed, and I thought to myself: 'Let her sleep.' But then I came back.

"'No,' I says, 'we'll all die together, children.'

"I took the little girl, and we went into the rye. And we sat in that rye one day, we sat there another day. The Germans walked around the open field, shouted, and we saw everything...

"One of my lads says: 'I want to eat.'



Symon Kaya



"Along the way, we spoke to the population in the language of machine-guns, there was no trace of pity in our hearts."

Nazi soldier Emil Holtz



"And I says: 'Eat the rye.'

"And he says: 'I'm not a crow to go pecking rye.'

"What did I feed them, you say? Didn't feed them anything, we sat there and that's all. I didn't eat for maybe five days then, I had such a scare... They killed everyone, burnt everything – even the crows didn't caw.

"That's what a fright it was...

"Only in the evening did we come and look at the site of that huge fire. Everything we had was burnt, we didn't have anything.

"My husband left the house earlier than me, and they killed him there. But I was left with the children...

"There weren't any more women with me, only our neighbour was left alive. He'd crawl through



**Mokrina Kovalchuk
and her farmstead**

the field on his hands and knees, looking, and say: 'Neither my mother, nor my wife, nor my children are left...'

"But now he is no longer among the living: he went to the front and the Germans killed him. He was called Yurik Shivilko. He went off to the front and said: 'I'm going to kill my enemies.' He went away, and never came back..."

"They burnt down two hundred farms.

"And did they ever shoot, did they ever kill people!..."

The collective farm's field of rye stands in a tall wall around Mokrina Kovalchuk's garden and house. The larks incessantly sing above it, as if hurrying the grain to ripen and bring joy to good

people's hearts. Their melody brings relief to the old woman, sets her to thinking about her sons and daughters-in-law, daughters and sons-in-law, grandsons and granddaughters, who now live in cities and whose lives she once saved by hiding them in the rye. She is awaiting their arrival, anticipating the surprise and joy they will feel at seeing how many good things she has grown on her own, like some garden enchantress.

All parents tried to save their children as best they could, each in his or her own way. A description of only the successful methods, which helped people to escape, would fill more than one volume with examples of parental courage and self-sacrifice which might do honour to any nation.

Fear fetters and ruins the weak in spirit but releases decisiveness in the stout-hearted.

On that ill-omened morning Anton Kaya, a staid, industrious Knyazhevodtsy householder, roused his two sons, fourteen-year-old Vasil and eleven-year-old Mikolai, and said: "You drive out the cows, lads. Drive them, and maybe you at least will be left alive. And me... well, I'm old already..."

That is how Vasil remembers the last words he heard his father say. The boys followed their father's advice and drove the cows to the end of the village. There a sentry stopped them and, yelling "to the right", ordered them to drive the cattle into the last farmyard.

"...That farmyard," **Vasil Antonovich Kaya** went on to say, "was very large and well fenced in. And they started to drive all the cattle in there, both horses and cows — everything together. And that householder also had beehives. The cattle smashed them up. Those bees crawled out — boy, did they fall on all that cattle! And on the people! And on the Germans! They covered their heads with their greatcoats and beat it out of that yard. But we didn't feel those bees, if they were stinging or not. We boys ran out into the street thinking: 'Where can we run to, where can you go here?...' We talked it over and went back into the village, to where everyone was..."

"And the commissar, who was from Lunnaya, a German, he was standing in front, and we had just begun to pass him like this. And he noticed that all the cattle had gone out into the field, and he calls to us. He whistles — calls us to him. We turned back. And he shows us: 'Take them all and herd them over there where the ferry is.' Well, all right. We scattered in a jiffy, thinking that maybe we'd get away after all. Ah, yes, we'd just begun to

run hither and thither when the Germans noticed us, that it was us, who'd run away from the farmyard. He comes after us. He's running, running and whistling. It was scary. We all stopped and went back. Only now he doesn't drive us into that same farmyard, but into the neighbouring one. Then we had farmsteads, one was far from the other.

"We're standing in the farmyard, and that German who drove us in there went away. And then the commissar drove up — he rode in a carriage — jumped out of the carriage and came up to us. He started to yell something at us and again gestures: 'The ferry!' And we then scattered, every man for himself. I didn't know, for example, where my brother was. Only I was left with this one friend — we went to school together. Him and I took a couple of cows and made our way through the rye: so that at least the Germans wouldn't notice that we were running away. Victor Brytko my friend was called. We drove those cows as far as the forest and then we left those cows. In the forest me and my buddy again split up... And we both sat there in the forest: he by himself and I by myself — for four days. We were afraid to come out... We were hungry, it was raining, but where could we go there... You'd go up to the highway — cars were coming, and you'd run back into the woods..."

Vasil faced parting with his parents and brother, "splitting up" with his friend, being cut off from people...

The younger **Kaya** brother, **Mikolai Antonovich**, also suffered from the loss of his parents and brother, as well as a general feeling of being adrift in this unfamiliar and suddenly so alien world gone mad.

"...When the bees started to sting that cattle,

there was nowhere it could go. And it started, that cattle, to stamp on us... And we don't know where to go. The horses broke the fence, and all that cattle went off wherever it fancied, all over the field.

"My brother seems to have already got away," I think. 'If only I could get to the forest, too.' I see my brother has run to the forest with a buddy. If only I could, too! I run into the forest, over toward the Niemen, and saunter along as though I'm driving a cow. I was just about to hide when that German who was on guard grabbed me by the scruff of the neck and drove me back to the village. What can I do? Those who were pals of mine — they'd all run away, and I alone was left... Then I see they've also nabbed one of my pals. I says to that pal: 'Kostya, let's go plead with them, maybe they'll let us go.'

"But he says: 'I'm not going to plead with them or say anything.'

"Because we were both already half-dead with fear. That German drove us back into the village. The whole village was already on fire. The trucks were already starting to drive off. And a file of Germans was combing the grounds.

"We saw one man jump out of the window, and the Germans go after him. And they weren't shooting any more, just throwing people into the fire alive. Well, there was nothing I was more afraid of... Let them kill me, I think, if only they don't throw me live into the fire.

"And he didn't shoot me, that German, but led me over there where it was burning to throw me into the fire. I says to my buddy: 'Kostya, he's going to throw us live into the fire.'

"And he took us to that very place we'd run away from. And some officer or whatever is walking along there. He beckoned us over with his finger. And he could speak Polish. I says to him: 'Sir, I'm not from here, I'm from Sukhinichi.

They want to kill us here, and I have to go home.'

"The German who drove us here is loading his rifle to shoot me. And that other one, that we met up with, shook this stick at him and let me go. I walked off a ways, and then came back:

"'Sir,' I says, 'that's my pal Kostya. Let him go, too. He's also from Sukhinichi, Kostya Borodavka. He was grazing the cows, he was hired to do it in Knyazhevodtsy.'

"And the German let us go. When we walked away, Kostya even gave me his pencil for keeps... Now he's far away, in Russia. But he got married here."

The father of three children, and expert smith and electric welder at the Svetly Putj Collective Farm, Mikolai Antonovich Kaya has settled in Sukhinichi, the neighbouring village which he called his own when he was threatened with death.

He spoke unhurriedly, sitting with us in the new collective-farm board office.

"Now people envy me for having made myself a good house. But they don't say how much woe I had!..."

No one should envy Mikolai and his deft hands, his zeal for work and his present happiness, even if his house really is like some beautiful toy or fairy-tale castle. It is something the exhausted orphan may well have dreamed of when, after that dreadful calamity, both he and his brother Vasil could not even live with their married sister in Sukhinichi. Posted on each house were lists of its residents, according to which the police checked people and seized everyone not accounted for, punishing those who harboured them with expulsion or death. Mikolai spent the long autumn nights in the bushes, and when winter came he holed up in barns and haylofts. The unfortunate boy did not

**Stone-mason Vasil Kaya
and his son**





Smith Mikolai Kaya

have a nook he could call his own. Hounded by the threat of death, he wandered all the way to the outskirts of Volkovysk, where he took refuge as a shepherd. In that period of homelessness and awful solitude, how could he not dream of his own house? It may be then that his imagination, inflamed by injustice and grief, pictured the shapes and colours of his fabulously decorated house, his own secure and cosy nest.

His older brother, Vasil Antonovich Kaya, has also settled in Sukhinichi and lives in a homey cottage as comfortable as a sturdy old beehive and so neat and tidy that one is almost afraid to walk in it. The kitchen is as clean and sparkling white as a pharmacy. The meticulous mason evidently likes this apple-pie order. After escaping death on that terrible day, he also developed a loathing for all the irrationality, mess, coarseness and filth he experienced through his many long years as a waif

during that awful time.

Vasil's young son, no less neat than his father, stands on the front steps, a well-tended, self-assured child. He grins and does not look away when one of us prepares to photograph him.

"Please do," his smiling face seems to say, "go ahead and take a picture, you're not the only ones to like me, strangers; well, what's wrong with that?"

When we asked Mikolai Kaya to leave his anvil for a minute in the collective-farm smithy, where he was rivetting brackets onto tractor brake shoes, to tear himself away from his work and come along with us for a while, he grinned good-naturedly and agreed. Sure, record it if you need to.

One of his fellow-workers asked: "Where are you going?"

And the smith answered with his artless grin: "To get a promotion!..."

Zbyshin

The local people, in Mogilyov fashion, say Zbooshin, and not Zbyshin, as the village is officially registered. It is a large village, made up of dozens of houses surrounded by orchards and widely scattered among the rolling hills.

We came there at noon on a sunny June day with strong hints of an imminent, but passing downpour. A few old lime trees grew in a green clearing where a festive, multicoloured crowd was noisily milling about in the sunshine and dense shade. From time to time an amateur brass band painstakingly played polkas, Cracoviennes and waltzes, but nobody danced... There were soft drinks, ice cream and books for sale. Little children were running around with coloured balloons on strings, and the balloons were flying away or bursting to peals of twittering laughter. The old people were either still on their way from their houses, gathering unhurriedly for the celebration, or already meeting up with their neighbours from this and nearby villages, and with former fellow-villagers come from the district centre Kirovsk, from Bobruisk, and from the regional centre Mogilyov, or Moogoolyov in local parlance. Although no distance is very far nowadays, friends and relatives living in different places still don't meet very often, for everyone is always in a hurry, always running somewhere... The young people, as could be expected, were either a bit carefree or simply merry, strolling up and down in little groups, with nevertheless a subdued air about them. There was no dancing or singing, and the Cracoviennes sounded out of place.

If it weren't for the monument at the edge of the clearing, on a small knoll near the kitchen-gardens, and if the people didn't know what had gathered them here, one might have wondered at the lack of merriment. Some people were even crying outright...

This was the thirtieth anniversary of that awful day when all of Zbyshin was shot and burnt down.

Today's children and young people are like shoots that sprang up from the bloody ashes because a few inhabitants, now already middle-aged or old people, returned from partisan detachments, from the fronts, from captivity or from evacuation, and even fewer, very, very few, by some miracle escaped the nazis.

Here, in the crowd, people point them out to us, this handful of persons *from the other world*, from the other side of the line of blood and fire which on June 21, 1942, divided off the peaceful life of yesterday from that of today.

We asked these people one by one to come with us to a house some way off, where the holiday-making wasn't audible, and tell us about what happened. They willingly complied, perhaps because the sunny day and the crowd did not soothe their feelings, but made them more than ever want to talk about the past.

Not far from the clearing where the festive crowd was partying in a subdued way, a stork's nest towered over Zbyshin at the top of a scorched lime tree. The baby storks could not yet fly, but they were visible from afar as white blotches in the nest.

They were also visible through the window of the house where, on a table decked with a white tablecloth and a vase of flowers, our trusty tape-recorder softly whirred as **Sofya Pimenovna Skirmand**, a calm, plump, seventy-year-old woman, told her story.

"...They herded people, you know, into the house — my house. I had gone into my house first, before them. Two of my children were with me, a boy of three and a girl of eight months. I went into the house — I could see things were in a bad way. I hit the window and it flew out of its frame. I carried the children out through the window."

QUESTION: "They hadn't yet surrounded the house?"

"They were still only herding people. I see they're already herding people. Where are they herding them? I don't yet know where they're herding them. I tossed my children out the window and myself crawled off this far, like from here to the door..."

"I lie there with my two children. I look this way and that. Zbooshin is burning. And the people in my house... I wondered why I couldn't hear those people, when the shooting was going on in my house. Uh-huh!—they were killing people..."

"I'd pressed myself down to the earth and couldn't hear anything."

"I lay there and lay there — a plane comes flying. That plane started to circle above me. 'Well, now he'll kill me!...' I peek at it on the sly."

"Well, when that plane had flown on, the storks came flying. See over there... Their nests were burning. Their children were burning! They go like this: zagh-zagh-zagh!... They're flying above me. Maybe they aren't above me, but it seems like they're above me... Their children... Their nest burnt up, right where it is now, only closer..."

We involuntarily looked out of the window at this symbol of peaceful housekeeping, the stork's nest, white with its still timid young, towering over the greenery of apple, cherry and birch trees.

"...Well, those storks flew off, and some ravens come. Black as black can be they are!... Well, I think, they're going to eat me!... Again they swoop: down — up, down — up! They flew around and around, and flew away, too."

"Now the one who finished people off comes on horseback. If he sees a person is alive he kills them off. I opened my eyes a chink and quietly look at him... And my children don't budge, they're as-

leep. Fell asleep.

"He came up to within about ten paces maybe, turned around and rode off..."

"I lay there right until evening. In the evening the little girl started to cry, she was very small, eight months old. I say: 'Here, sweetie, take my breast...' The vehicles revved up and drove off. 'I'll raise my head,' I thought. And right at that moment the vehicles stopped. I see that they'd seen from the car that some children had hidden in the rye: a mother and father and their four children. They stopped and killed them. Another person got up to look there — they killed that one, too. Drove up to him and killed him."

"I go on lying there."

"The shots stopped. The children started to cry. I got up and went into the woods..."

Mikolai Pavlovich Khodosevich, now a man in his prime, was then a thirteen-year-old boy, who saw nazism at close range with the fresh, pure eyes of a child who already understood much almost as an adult.

"...They stopped me in the street. 'Go to the meeting!'"

"Well, so I went. I came, and the men had already been all herded together there... Then they drove us down the street. There was a shed there, rather, a barn. Germans and policemen were driving us. There were, damned if you could make head or tail of it, German uniforms, and in Russian, in civilian clothes."

"Well, then they shot at the eaves with tracer bullets. The eaves caught on fire."

QUESTION: "And what did the people say amongst themselves?"

"They didn't say anything. We had this one guy, Andrei Naumenko, he was also burnt up, well, he, see, understood German well. And he



**Zbyshin on June 21, 1972. Thirty years ago
to the day village was razed to the ground**



says: 'They're going to burn us.' He heard them talking over the radio... And so that Naumenko said: 'They're going to drive us into that barn now and burn us.'

"As soon as they had driven us in, they set us on fire. Well, some people jumped out alive. There were side gates, and they, you know, knocked them down, well, and started to jump out. Well, and I — there was a place there to dry grain — I ended up in there, and sat there until the hat on my head caught fire. But my brother dashed out earlier. He gets up to jump out, and calls to me: 'Lie down!' And I lay down next to him. He was killed and I was wounded, about eight metres, no more, from the barn. Well, then I just lay there. The shooting was fierce: you couldn't make out if it was rain or them shooting. The screaming and noise there was!... The shooting began to die down. The checking got underway. When they came up to me for the second time, I'm lying face down. They, you know, raised me with a rifle barrel under my right eyebrow. This high, as if on outstretched arms. They mumbled something in German and let me drop. They thought I was killed.

"Well, and the wounded that screamed, those they killed off.

"They left around nine o'clock. And they wounded me, you know, at 1 p. m. I got up — the sun was already setting. I went down the street, went toward my house. There were dead people in the street, and burnt people in the houses; I didn't have anybody at home either. It got dark. My legs started to tighten up, they were wounded, I'd lost blood..."

QUESTION: "So you say the men broke down the doors?"

"Uh-huh, as soon as they set the barn on fire, you know, they went and broke them down..."

"And there was this other man. He had a little

girl, about two years old. She wrapped her little arms around his neck like this, from the front, and he carried her out like that. She's still alive today..."

It fills one with joy to think that she is alive today and that she will live on, invincibly repeating herself in other little girls and boys; it fills one with joy as one looks at Mikolai Khodosevich in the crowd alongside his niece Galya, a young mother carrying one of those eternal repetitions, a son.

Here in the clearing everything was simple, ordinary and familiar: the monument, like many we had already seen in various corners of Byelorussia; the speaker's platform, actually the body of an off-duty truck carefully parked where needed; the speeches of some of those present, with which the memorial meeting began; the stakes of the fence beyond the monument, where a rooster perched itself and suddenly began to crow, without, however, causing anyone to laugh; and the rain, which started just when it felt like it, regardless of the people and their speeches.

Thirty years ago Rygor Zakharovich Kagan, chairman of the local collective farm, was a ten-year-old Jewish boy, the village blacksmith's son, who underwent untold torments at the hands of the enemy and was saved by his people. Today he is an agronomist with a higher education, a manager respected by the people with whom he works. He spoke for a long time, but to the point, reviewing the international situation and connecting the past with the tasks of today. When he spoke about what happened here *then*, he involuntarily uttered a phrase which we felt impelled to write down:

"Men with straps on their shoulders killed women, helpless old men and children..."

The words were simple, but well-considered

and keenly felt, expressing all the deep and fearful disparity: men with straps who were not soldiers, but the murderers of defenceless people.

The next to speak was **Ivan Maximovich Savitsky**, a local man who works in the district Soviet and who went through hell thirty years ago. In contrast to the collective-farm chairman, he had written his speech beforehand, and a secretary at work had typed it out for him. But the rain, which began just then, and the tears blurring his vision hampered his reading. Savitsky was less steady than Kagan, quite a lot older, wearier and more impressionable, and his speech somehow did not come off. Maybe it partly seemed so because that morning, before coming to Zbyshin, we had met him in Kirovsk, where he had told us a lot about *that day*, pouring out his heart and hiding his tears in the smoke of the cigarettes which he chain-smoked during his account.

...His married sister had lived on the outskirts of Zbyshin, about three hundred metres from the woods, and he, a young partisan, had come to visit her at dawn, hiding his rifle at the edge of the forest.

His sister was getting breakfast ready, and Ivan lay down on the bed and began to play with his small nephews. At that moment some *polizeis* came in and asked whether there weren't any partisans there; luckily they weren't local men and didn't know Ivan. They ordered everyone to go to a meeting (sinister word! Almost everywhere the punitive expeditions began with a "meeting"), ate what had been prepared for the family and left.

The mistress of the household took her children and went to where she had been ordered, but, just in case, Ivan crawled into the hayloft, and started to watch through cracks in the boarding.

Alarm and a fearful presentiment took hold of him when three Germans who were walking down

the street drove his sister, who had paused near the gate with her children, to the meeting with blows of their rifle butts and swearing... They themselves went into the house, ransacked everything, as Ivan could hear, and then came into the shed. Ivan buried himself in some hay right next to the wall. But they only drove the cow out into the yard, chased away the hens and left.

"And at that moment," Ivan Maximovich recounted, "terrible shooting began in the village..."

The youth realized they were shooting people... And there again occurred that amazing thing we heard about from many people — under the most inappropriate, horrible conditions, they were overcome with drowsiness. "I start to doze, start to fall asleep..." But then he heard a noise and smelt smoke... Looking out through the crack, he saw that all the buildings around had been set on fire, were burning — the house, the shed, the hayloft. "Let it, the shed, get good and blazing," he thought, "and then I'll crawl out, then there won't be any Germans in the vicinity." However well he wrapped himself up in his coat, it was soon scorching hot, and he jumped out of the hayloft and into the yard.

"...What can I do? Run out through the gates — the shed is burning there. To the right the house is burning. And between the hayloft and the house, about ten metres or so away, is a palisade, and it's about three metres high. Well, in the first place, that is burning and the other is burning — I might be felled by the fire. Well, that didn't scare me. What scared me was that I'd climb up three metres and the Germans would see me. I think: if I lie down in the middle of the yard — it's thickly built-up, I won't be able to stand it... Well, it was just some kind of intuition. There were three doors to that shed. I went out one of them





"You have no heart, no nerves, there is no need for them in war. Kill every Russian and Soviet, do not hesitate if you see in front of you an old man or a woman, a girl or a boy—kill them..."

From an instruction to nazi soldiers

and came back in through the second. And everything is burning above me. Then I went through the third door and see — a hole! A hole under the wall! Who dug it, that hole — maybe dogs, or people to escape by?... ‘Well,’ I think, ‘I’m saved!...’

“The shed blazed up. And I’m standing there. Well, you know, when a candle burns, it’s hot around the edges, but not in the middle. The shed is burning around me, and I’m standing there. And when I just couldn’t stand there any longer, when it began to get scorching hot, I crawled out under the wall. And there was a field of rye there. It was already hiding someone. Ahead was Levon’s threshing barn, my sister’s brother-in-law. I decided that I’d crawl up to that barn, and there, where the potatoes were planted, creep along a furrow and into the forest. There I had a rifle and — I’d have got away!...

“I hadn’t crawled fifteen metres toward that barn when I looked and saw three Germans with a heavy machine-gun!... Some magic force turned me back toward the burning shed. And I lay down in a furrow. And I thought: ‘If they find me — the devil take them — let them shoot me! From behind...’ And that instant the shed — crash! — collapsed. It burnt up and toppled over, collapsed. I moved even closer, but so I wouldn’t get completely scorched. And I lie there. And then... I have to tell a detail like that of course, don’t I? And then — up comes a pig! And it starts circling around me, maybe because it sees I’m alive. I think: ‘O my God, the Germans are standing there! They’ll come not because of me, but because of the pig and, so they’ll discover me!...’ Lying there like that I took some sand and threw it like this! (*He shows how he threw it.*) And it went off.

“By that time the shooting had already died down. It was about seven in the evening. And I’m still lying there. I hear the vehicles start up with a roar and leave for Chichevichi... And then there

were two shots! There hadn’t been any shots for quite a while, and here there were two shots. I think: ‘They found someone else...’

“And that, as I found out later, was them killing my neighbour, Alyona Baranovskaya, and her fourteen-year-old daughter, who had also lain hidden in the rye. The Germans found them and killed them.

“About two more hours went by after those two shots. And then there was one more!

“‘Can they really have found and killed someone else?’ I thought.”

That last shot killed Ivan’s father.

He was sixty-seven, and had been hiding all day at the edge of the woods with his grown nephew. However hard the younger man tried to convince his uncle to go farther into the forest, he could not get the old fellow to tear himself away from the shooting and flames, in which everyone and everything he held dear had perished. When the shooting died down and the vehicles drove away from Zbyshin, he left the forest and went into the village, where he ran into mounted police. The last of them...

Ivan heard that final shot, but he only found out considerably later whom it had been directed at...

“...At midnight I got up and went out into the street, and here I was seized by an animal fear. My rifle is three hundred metres away, in the bushes, but I’m afraid to go into the woods... I think, I won’t go into the woods, I’ll go to the other end of the village, where our house is. And I’m also afraid to go along the street. I jumped over a fence and went through the back yards.

“I’m walking along and stumble over something. I recognized my sister’s father-in-law lying there. Farther on I see his wife lying. I walk to-

ward the end where our house is. One guy had dug himself a dug-out there. I think: maybe someone hid there...

"There are towels, you know, pillow-cases lying around that dug-out. I realized that no living people could be there — the Germans had already pillaged everything. I even stuck my head in there and called out. It smelt of powder gas. That meant they'd thrown grenades in there.

"And then I, you know, went on further.

"There was the collective-farm yard there, four sheds. Well, three had burnt down and one was left. And farther on, near the stream, my pa had sown millet. I knew about that. I see some women lying there, four women, one behind the other. They're lying along a furrow, killed. I, you know, thought maybe Mummy's there... It was already dark, but by the clothing I determined that my mother wasn't here. I look and see a man lying killed. I ran up, it's pa, I thought. No, that was my uncle lying there.

"Everything in our yard burnt down, but the shed was left. We had a log there. I sat down, sat there for a while and thought: 'What shall I do now?' There's nothing left in the village, only Anton's dog is barking. I recognized him by his bark...

"I then walked to our Vetryanka. It's the name of this stream we have. I sat down on the bank, lowered my legs. And then I hear someone going splash-splash, splash-splash across the streamlet... Someone's crossing the stream! 'Well,' I think, 'here's a living person!...' I crossed the stream. And the old woman who was walking along caught sight of me and took to her heels. I was young, and she was about seventy — I overtook her, and she makes the sign of the cross over me: 'Ah, my dear!...'

"Where were you?' I ask.

"I was sitting in the bushes,' she says. 'Ger-

mans were walking all around and didn't see me. And I was left alive.'

"I took her by the arm... At that moment, you know, if even a cat had been alive — even that would have put you in a different mood, and here was a live person!... I took the old woman by the arm, and we went into the woods.

"There's a stand of firs in there which we call Anton's. And I see the outlines that there were some people there. I told the woman to lie down, and myself crouched and hailed them: 'Who goes there?'

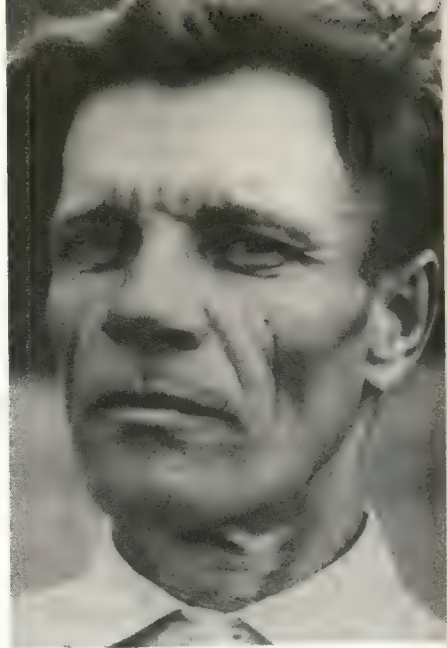
"As soon as I called, they all dashed into the woods! Well, I think, that means they're some of us. If they'd been policemen, they'd have started to click their breech-blocks. I got up.

"Lads, I'm so-and-so, don't run away!'

"They stopped and we met up. With them there was also the son-in-law of that old woman. I says to him: 'Here's what, Tikhon, you take the old woman and go into the forest. And we, lads, let's go into the village. Maybe someone's wounded somewhere, and we'll get them and take them along.'

"They obeyed me like some kind of commander. And we're walking like this, you know, along the stream. Well, the stream, as a rule, runs along a depression. People had tried to get away along the stream, and it is so shallow that, as the saying goes, a chicken could cross it. And Vasil Yenov is lying there at the beginning. His trunk is on the bank, on the sand, and his other half is in the stream. We dragged him out onto the bank. We go farther along the stream and find Boris Stasev lying there. And he, you know, had two small loaves of bread he had taken with him. Well, we hadn't eaten all day, see! So we split up that bread on the spot. Well, and we went along like that to the edge of the village. We come to the edge, and I think I hear my mother's voice saying something...

Mikolai Khodosevich
Ivan Savitsky
Sophia Skirmand





“‘Stop, lads,’ I says.

“I hear my mother really is speaking. I left them and ran over there like a little boy...

“I ran up and they’re all standing near our shed. Our Katya is standing there (she’s still alive now), Volga (she’s already dead) and my mother... And my uncle Zakhar is also standing there (he died back in fifty-seven). His arm was wounded here and his leg here. He’s standing there trembling all over.

“‘Mummy, and you, Katya, go over there, the house there is still standing, it didn’t burn down. Wet a rag with urine...’

“There was no other way out. I knew it was a prophylactic measure after all.

“They went into the house, my mother tore up a shirt, they did everything, they bandaged up my uncle. And then I remembered that I had seen a sheepskin coat lying next to someone. And I said I’d run and get it, because my uncle was shaking all over.

“So I jumped over the fence, and there we had this... a roofed-in place, an awning. And by the outlines I see there are people there! They’re moving under that awning. I run up to it – Varka Ignatikha is sitting there, she was close on seventy

at the time, and Pilipikha, she was blind.

“‘What are you doing here?’

“‘Sonny, the Germans walked around here and said: ‘Let them live – the Soviet Union can use them to multiply!...’” And the old women said: ‘Misha is lying wounded over there. Maybe he’s still alive, child.’

“I went over that way. It was night, and dark, but I found him. Dead. Then I ran on, took that sheepskin coat, and collected those old women. But they don’t want to go.

“‘Child, where shall we go? They didn’t kill us then, so they won’t kill us now.’

“By the time I came back, they had already dressed uncle Zakhar’s wounds.

“On the way to the forest my uncle told me how he survived. They, the men, had been herded into the barn, and the women, into Skirmand’s house. When, you know, they set the barn on fire, the men broke down the gates and those who got away, you know, got away; if they were killed, you know, they were killed; and those who stayed in the barn burnt up in the barn... Uncle Zakhar, you know, when the barn blazed up and they smashed the gates, he also got out. His sweater started to burn on him. He lay low in the rye field,

took off his sweater and ran into a nearby yard. And there stood, simply speaking, a barrel, and he crawled into that barrel and sat in there. A German came – peeks in! – and he's sitting there. He fired one at him. And he, the way he was sitting in the barrel, his arm and leg were shot through. The German set fire to the barn. Well, my uncle was alive all the same. He turned onto his side then, tipped over the barrel and rolled along with the barrel, and into the stream under a snag. And he sat there like that in the water until midnight, wounded as he was. That's why he was shaking so...

"Many people broke out of that barn where they locked up the men to burn them. But only two women got out of the house. Sonya Skirmand. It was in her house that they burnt the women. And there was this Volga. Later we even took her wounded into the camp. And we also found Danila Vorobyev. This Danila was a cobbler. And he had boots. True, he limped a bit. The policeman says to him: 'Take off your boots!'

"No,' he says, 'I won't take them off. You can take them off when you kill me.'

"I'll kill you!' the other says.

"Well go ahead and shoot!"

"He went and shot him – bang. Pierced his lung. My mother cured him afterwards. She worked in the hospital, knew about those things. And she treated him. His whole family was exterminated: both his children and his wife...

"My father...

"I was told he was lying killed, and where. And so I, you know, went there...

"He had this beard – a beautiful ginger beard. I was still small when he, I remember, shaved it off once, and we, all us children, yelled at him not to shave... He was so nice-looking with his beard. He had a golden beard...

"They shot him here, in the back of the head,

and his whole jaw, his whole beard was torn off...

"I ran into the village and found, you know, a burnt shovel, came back there, broke off a stick, stuck it somehow in the metal part, dug, you know, a hole, took off my coat, wrapped him up and buried him. I swore an oath over him, cried a bit with Mummy, and we went off...

"When we came to where they had burnt the women – it was so awful... A pile of people!...

"Mummy started to look for her daughter, my sister.

"And I still bore up when I was burying my father, but when we came over there where they burnt the women, I felt faint...

"Mummy,' I said, 'let's not look.'

"And we went to where they'd burnt the men. What stuck in my memory for the rest of my life was the son of my first cousin. There was a drying barn there, and he crawled into the stove in the barn and burnt up in there. His legs are sticking out, see, all burnt...

"Twenty-five of my folks perished on that day. Altogether they killed two hundred and ninety-six people in Zbyshin."

QUESTION: "What reason did they think up, what did they say when they herded the people together?"

"They didn't say anything. The reason was, I think, only that they were Soviet people..."

* * *

"We are obliged to exterminate the population", said Hitler. "It is part of our mission to protect the German population... Should I be asked what I mean when I speak of exterminating the population, I will answer that I have in mind the extermination of whole racial units..."⁷

In carrying out this "plan", the nazis counted on thus achieving a peaceful rear as well. Whoever wasn't killed or burnt would grow numb with

horror. They drew a line near each person's feet: if they moved, it would mean death for them and their relatives and their whole village, or, if they lived in the city, for their whole street.

But soon after the "victorious" communiques about how many partisans had been killed (those same women and children from Zbyshin or Khvoinya), quite different ones began to reach the Führer's headquarters.

Von Kluge: "Here in the rear I have partisans everywhere, who are still not only not smashed, but keep growing in strength all the time... And 400 of those damned acts of sabotage on the railway!"⁸

"So much the better," said Hitler in July 1941 when he first heard about the Soviet partisans; he hoped that under the guise of fighting them he would conveniently be able to carry out his "General Plan 'Ost'". In 1942, and all the more so in 1943 and 1944, when the nazis had lost all hope of a victorious outcome to the war and they had almost no operating railways left in Byelorussia, Hitler no longer thought it was "so much the better". The premeditated extermination of the peoples of the Soviet Union began more and more to acquire a character of vengeance — sadistic vengeance on women and children for the fact that the Soviet people did not want to submit and continued to fight under the most tragic conditions.

1,255 fighting partisan detachments — this was the Byelorussian people's answer to the nazi "theoreticians'" and "practicians'" calculations, their answer to the claim that the Byelorussians were the "most inoffensive" of all Slavs and that it would be possible to feel secure here while arranging a "preserve" for people, for whole peoples, here. There really was a scheme to transform all of Byelorussia into an all-European concentration camp, where the peoples of Europe that "hindered" nazi Germany from expanding to the

north, west, south and east would undergo "special processing" in gas chambers, crematoria and mass graves...

This is how the matter was formulated by Hitler's closest assistant, the "theoretician" Rosenberg, two days before the attack on the Soviet Union:

"This boundary (immediately before this passage Rosenberg had discussed the future fate of the Baltic states — *Authors' note.*) directly borders on the Byelorussian — a centre where all the socially dangerous elements are concentrated and which will be maintained as a preserve."⁹

But to start with, as has already been said, the nazis planned to "evict" (exterminate) 75 per cent of the Byelorussians, so they would have an easier time working in that "preserve".

And they actually tried to do so. The accounts in this book are precisely about the villages that were killed, the districts that were put to the torch together with their inhabitants.

But above and beyond the awful fate of these villages and people one must also keep in mind the hundreds of thousands of women and children, aged and feeble villagers and townspeople who were rescued and saved from extermination by the people's partisan army, which led them away into the woods or beyond the front, created Soviet districts in the enemy's rear, defended and attacked...

The half-million-strong gang of nazi murderers and plunderers was swallowed by the flaming partisan land...

If the nazis were unable to "depopulate" Byelorussia and create their huge "preserve" — concentration camp there for the peoples of Europe, it is not because they changed their mind or lost the desire to. Rising in sacred struggle, the Soviet people, the people's avengers — the partisans — and the Soviet Army foiled this nazi plan as well.

Velikaya Garozha

Beyond a glorious field of rye lies a quiet little village which had, has and should have the right to a life of peaceful, work-filled quietude.

There hadn't been any rain for quite some time, but on the two days preceding our arrival it had fallen abundantly, and now it was a lovely late afternoon. The first June mushrooms had begun to spring up in the woods beyond the field and village.

The yard we entered was tidy and evenly overgrown with grass. In one corner was a large stock of firewood. An old woman was cleaning mushrooms on the front steps; she had just come back from the woods and her rubber boots were still wet. The mushroom season, a cause for yearly joy and a good way to start the conversation, had begun.

Maria Zmitrovna Potapeika is seventy-one, though she doesn't look it. She is a lively, cordial, gay old woman, and we were reluctant to plunge her back into the fearful distant past. Nor did she feel like returning to it: her face at once grew overcast...

"...Early in the morning I'm stoking the stove, frying pancakes, well, and we had a son, and he ran out into the street — he already wanted to go play with the neighbours. He was already running over there, running — oh-oh, for some reason they're shooting in the street, the bullets are whistling away!... Well, so we yelled at him: 'A fine time you picked for running, just sit here quietly! People are coming there — maybe partisans, maybe Germans, who knows!...'

"Well, they're walking through the village, walking along — Germans, we see it's Germans!... There was a well here, they set up a machine-gun — they're already herding, herding, herding cows from the other end of the village.

"My husband says to me: 'Go milk the cow.'

"I ought to go milk her, but I'm afraid.

"He goes: 'What are you afraid of! Go on, because they'll take away the cow any minute.'

"Well, I went and am milking away...

QUESTION: "You went to milk her for the last time?"

"Uh-huh. I'm milking. They're shooting. They're shooting in the yards, shooting. They'd reached the neighbours over there already and were shooting. I left off milking and went toward the door. I'd just come out when I met them there — running. Germans, running, running into the yard. And they asked whether we had a cow, whether we had hens, geese, horses, sheep, everything. Well, we didn't have anything more, all we still had was the cow, and hens... We had a horse, but we'd hidden it, it was hidden."

QUESTION: "In the woods?"

"Uh-huh, in the woods.

"Well, I says: 'There's a cow, and hens, but nothing more.'

"They sent me back to drive out the cow. I drove out the cow for them. Then I go back, and they run after me into the house, come running. Well, they ran in and drove us out into the yard, they did, to the commandant. Well, we left the children, and said to them: 'Kids, stay in the house, we'll just go there by ourselves.'

"Well, we went, and the Germans went and drove the children out of the house, and they came up to us again. We're walking along the street, we are, and a German is coming our way. Him and two more... They're coming our way, their robes are all bloody — and... They met up with us and asked: 'Were there partisans here?'

"Well, we said: 'There were. Sure there were.'

"How many?"

"There were four carts.'

"And what did they take?"

“They took everything they needed. Bread and potatoes and meat.”

“Then the commandant came along from here, from this here end and talked with him: ‘Ger-ger-ger.’ And he said to drive the cows, drive the cows to Osipovichi.

“My husband went. And my daughter. But she sees that I’m not going, and she came back. I says: ‘Why did you come back, why didn’t you run with your father? He’ll hide there somewhere, and you could have hidden, too. But if we go over there, they’ll burn and kill us.’

“And they really did draw up the girls separately from us. The girls to drive the cows. And they asked: ‘Were there partisans here?’

“They asked the first man. He says: ‘There weren’t any, I didn’t see any.’

“Since he didn’t see any, the German grabbed him by the collar... He was holding a little child in his arms. Grabbed him by the collar and – threw him down by the shed, into the snow, into a snow-drift, and killed him.”

QUESTION: “The child, too?”

“Well, the child was there with him, and he killed the child, too. Uh-huh. Then his wife holding their older child by the hand began to wail, to wail out: ‘E-e-e!...’ He shoved her there, too, and killed her. And the little boy was standing next to me – a little boy like this...”

QUESTION: “Their little boy?”

“Uh-huh. He darted off toward them. And I went after him, says: ‘Don’t run, stop, stop!’

“He really did stop and stand still. He’s still alive now and living somewhere in the city, God knows where. His last name is Potapeika, but I’ve forgotten his first...”

We were talking in the old woman’s bright, clean kitchen. Her two granddaughters from

town, there on vacation, were quietly standing by the window; one was around thirteen, the other still quite a child. Her husband, **Kastus Kar-povich**, was also sitting there; he had returned from the village shop when we were still out in the yard with his wife and greeted us from the gate with a gay: “Hullo there, my fine young chaps!...” Now he was silently listening, and then he himself started to talk:

“...It was New Year’s day, old style, in nineteen forty-three.

“Early in the morning some people came and are pulling a machine-gun – there was a well right here – all in white robes.

“We’re sitting in the house. We had an iron stove, a little tin one. I had four little children: the oldest girl was in the sixth form. But the others were all small. Uh-huh. And we hear them shooting from that end. Cows are running down the street... Uh-huh, and then right here at the corner lived my uncle, father’s brother. And that uncle of mine drove his cow out here into the street. He – bang, shot him!...”

QUESTION: “You saw all that?”

“Well, we saw it from the window. Uh-huh. Uncle’s wife set up a howl. And he shot his wife there, too. Then their two girls. He shot both their girls, too. Right there in the gateway. I says they’re killing people. Uh-huh. And then they made for another house. As soon as they went in, we hear shooting in the house. Well, and we’re sitting there like this. Then they went into the third house – we also hear shooting... Well, it’s the end!

“And then – suddenly – a car came along. This guy gets out, without a robe on. Well, he was an officer, ‘kommendant’ they called him. Well, here they all came running, gathered around, and



Maria Potapeika

he commanded them not to kill anymore, you know, the rest of the people. But to herd them together into one place.

"They came running to me and say: 'Go to the commandant.'

"And I says: 'How – with my children, should I take the children?'

"And he waved his hand: as you like, if you want to, take them, if not, don't. They know it's all the same... Well, me and my wife up and went.

"I says: 'You kids sit here and keep warm by the stove, we'll come and get you...'"

The old man went on to repeat what his wife had said about how the German commandant had questioned him as to whether there were ever any partisans in the village and did not shoot him as he did the neighbour who said he hadn't seen any.

"...And the German ordered me to drive the cows to the other end of the village.

"'There,' the German says, 'we'll collect some more people and drive all the cows to Osipovichi, because there is a partisan camp here, you supply the partisans. And we're going to destroy your village.'

"That's what he said. And I drove off those cows.

"And my sister lived over that way. I ran into my sister's house. I ran in and everyone had been killed to the last soul!... Her mother-in-law, she, her husband and little child, four people.

"They come, the vermin, and command everyone to lie down. And then they shoot each person in the head like this, kill them and that's all...

"But some were left alive all the same. There's Neverovich across the way – the lad was on the stove, covered himself with some bedding; they

killed his sister, they killed his mother and father, but he was left and is still alive today. He works in Bobruisk. And it was the same at the other end..."

The Potapeika family and a few others were lucky. After giving vent to their anger, the nazis told those who were left: "You can go to Tatarka, to Zamoshye, to Osipovichi... But if we catch anyone here, we'll kill them. And we're going to burn the whole village now."

And so they did.

Kastus Potapeika harnessed his horse, collected his children and moved to Zamoshye...

Afterwards we called on **Maria Gerasimovna Mikhailik**. She was eighteen in January 1943 and also managed to escape. But let her tell the story herself.

"...It was dark. They surrounded the village and started to shoot.

"Mummy says: 'Dear, they're shooting, get up!'

"I say: 'What, partisans?'

"She answers: 'Partisans.'

"We look out the window. Men are coming in white robes. My mother says: 'They lagged behind a bit, and now they're shooting.'

"Because that night they had been in our village, the partisans. We think they're looking for each other.

"Mummy says: 'Go get water.'

"I went to draw water from the well, and they – Germans they were – turned me back.

"'Komm into the house!'

"I went back.

"'Mummy, they didn't let me get water. You

go.'

"They turned Mummy back, too.

"And they started to fire from this here end. I says: 'Mummy, something is burning there already, you know.'

"Go milk the cow,' she says, 'because they take away the cows and kill the hens.'

"Well, I went and milked the cow. Then Mummy says: 'They kill the hens. Get the hens into the house.'

"Well, we're sitting in the house. My nephew came. He asks: 'Did you have partisans here?'

"Mummy says: 'We did, I gave them their evening meal, bread and milk I gave them, and they left.'

"We're talking. And then she says: 'Children, look, they're killing our Prokhor!...'

"It was at the neighbours', Mummy saw it through the window. My sister with her little daughter was also with us. Mummy said: 'Look!...'

"There were three shots — and the little girls crawled on top of the shed.

"Well, immediately after they came to us. We're all standing next to the stove. We wringing our hands like this, and the stove is burning. Well, they came... A tall, tall man came, wearing glasses. It seems like I'm seeing him now, I'd recognize him... He came and opened up the house. To me he says: 'Go let out the cow!'

"And he sends my brother out into the street.

"I went to let out the cow. But she won't move. She's also afraid, the cow, she's almost climbing the walls. I came out of the shed into the yard, and he hit me so hard I just went flying. He slugged me with the handle of his Tommy-gun. Twice. The first time I didn't go flying, so he did it again.

"Mummy comes out of the house. As soon as Mummy stepped out, he fired at her — he riddled her whole neck here, and all this here fell off. And

my mother dropped down immediately.

"He went away. He also gave me a kick like this, and sent us out into the street — to drive the cow. I heaved that cow out into the street. And there this old man — he's already dead — was standing... A cow was standing there, and he was hugging that cow like this... And they beat him so hard, beat him so hard!...

"I said to my brother: 'Brother,' I says, 'Brother, everyone has hidden,' I says, 'but we'll get it now...'"

QUESTION: "Was that old man hugging the cow so as not to drive her away?"

"Nope, they'd beaten him bad, he'd fallen onto the cow and was standing there. And cows are wandering about, horses are neighing — it was dismal and frightening... I says: 'We didn't hide, and now we're done for, brother dear. We'll perish.'

"Well, we're standing there, where could we go, we're standing in the middle of the street. There's nobody anywhere — well, not a soul! They'd already killed everyone.

"We go over here, to the edge, we stand at the edge of the village. And Germans are lying there with these machine-guns. There's nowhere we can go. And they come toward us.

"Well,' I says, 'Brother, we'll perish. Let's run away, so they kill us on the run rather than like this...'

"They came up and said: 'Don't run away or else we'll kill you. You'll drive the cows and go to Germany.'

"And another one came over, he also spoke our language.

"How old are you?"

"I say I'm eighteen and my brother fourteen...

"And I'd gone out, to tell you the truth, I was only wearing galoshes, like this, on my bare feet, and like this, with no coat on. I didn't have any-

thing on me. I says: 'Well, let's beat it, Ivan!...' to my brother.

"And in the house that was across the way they had seven or eight children there. What shrieking there was in there! They're shrieking, shrieking — you could hear them!...

"Well, that's it — we're running! Well, we ran into the woods, across the highway, through the swamp. And the snow was like this, up to your waist. I crawled into the swamp and didn't have anything left on my feet. And they're firing away at us, firing away... But we weren't once hit by a bullet!...

"We lay down in that snow, lay there for a while, and then we got up and sat in the woods until evening, until it got dark.

"We found a partisan place: they'd evidently spent the night there — there were still warm embers and strings were still hanging there. He took those strings that the partisans had left, and he had bast shoes on and foot bindings, and he bound up my feet, too. But during the night my feet got like this, they'd gotten frost-bitten. See — I don't have any toes... We spent the night there. I can't walk anymore... My brother broke off two sticks for me..."

A quiet little village lies beyond a glorious field of rye... And on that snowy day 297 persons were killed in this village.

A Child Running Along a Furrow

We met this woman by chance.

Roman Dragun, a former partisan, invalid and retired bookkeeper, whom the Party district committee suggested we consult, approached the matter seriously. He left off directing his family's well-digging, washed, changed his clothes and, with difficulty managing his artificial limb and cane, got into our land rover. From the secluded green station of Koptsevichi where he now lived, we set off for the western corner of Petrikov District, Gomel Region, where he originally came from. After getting everything done there, we headed for home as dusk was falling. And then our guide remembered one more person, in the village of Sloboda. "Maybe he'll tell you something, too."

His acquaintance, Adam Strakach, also a former partisan, did not himself see what happened in his native village of Bereznyaki (he moved to Sloboda after the war). Of its four hundred inhabitants, only a handful by some miracle escaped death at the nazis' hands in November 1942. Among them was Adam's sister Alyona, who also lived in Sloboda, a few houses away...

Alyona Ivanovna Bulava was a lot older than her brother, a feeble old woman well over seventy who moved with great difficulty. This we at first only sensed from her tired voice and laboured breathing. It was twilight and the old woman was resting on her bed with her clothes still on. Her energetic brother turned on the light and told her that she simply must tell what happened then in Bereznyaki.

The old woman got up and, grasping the situation, gradually warmed up and began.

"...My head aches all the time, and I'm also very hard of hearing...

"Well, how was it. They killed all our people there. There were so many people lying there on the next day... And the wolves got used to it and caught people afterwards. Got used to eating people..."

"Well, they surrounded us all around, the whole village. At that time I was in the house. I went out of the house and didn't see that a German with a cockade was standing there. He aimed his rifle — right like this at me. And my little boy that was in my arms, Sashka, threw his arms around my neck and cried: 'O, Mom, they'll kill us!...'"

"And I says: 'No, no, sonny, the man won't kill us, no, no!...'"

"When I said that, he really did lower his rifle. And he points at me: go home!"

"I went into the house and says to my girl: 'Yeva, they're going to kill us.'"

"What shall we do, Mummy?"

"I also had another boy, Kolya. He was already, I think, in the third or fourth form. Kolya says: 'Mum, I'll run and hide in the moss.'"

"And I says: 'If you can... But maybe you won't be able to slip by, sonny?'"

"We don't see that they're sitting there, in helmets. They put on those helmets like some kind of stumps and you can't see them. My little lad all but got through. He wanted to slip past, poor little thing, but they — bang! — in the chest, right here. He just screamed: 'Mummy!...'"

"And how can I — a mother's heart! I sprang out and ran to him. And my Yeva sprang out, too. And I grabbed hold of the child, of my Sasha, and clasped him to me. And he — band! — wounded me in the arm. And he was going to shoot again, but Yeva grabbed hold of me and says: 'Mam, let them kill us together. Let them kill me, too, with you!...'"

"And I wanted to fall flat, but then I think: 'But

what will happen to the girl! And I have the child in my arms...'

"He wanted to hit Yeva, but again — got me in the arm. And right here. And my arm dropped. And I dropped the child. It ran a little ways. And Yeva went after me. I says to her: 'Fall down with me!' And then they wounded me once again, but they didn't hit the little girl. Right here they wounded me, and the bullet popped out right here. I was already all wilted, and I fell down myself. I fell down and says to my little girl: 'Did they wound you?' She says they didn't. And the blood is just gushing and pouring out of me. They shot through the vein here, see. And I says: 'Fall down with me. And keep lying there — don't budge. Fall down and lie still. Maybe I won't be alive, but you lie there. And watch for a chance to hide under the bank somehow.'

"And I already see that my little lad Kolya is lying there dead...

"But the other one, that was small, went running along a furrow. Sasha. And the ploughing was deep, so they didn't even hit the boy. And explosive bullets are flying. But the little boy is alive all the same, keeps running along the furrow all the same.

"And a woman was crawling along the ditch there. And she calls out like this: 'Come here!...' She pulled him into that ditch. Sasha was left with that woman...

"And I'm lying there. And Yeva is lying behind me. And blood is running from me. And they're walking around the yard, jabbering. They let out my cows, there were two, drove the sheep out into the street, and the pigs. And I'm lying there and peeking like this. And they set fire to my house and went to the neighbour's... That neighbour fell to his knees and begs for mercy. And they shot him in the chest — bang!... I lie there and think to myself: 'Well, it's the end.' My child ran off and

I don't know if it is alive there or not... And then, when I saw it was already all burning, that firebrands were flying onto me, I set about getting up somehow. I crawled on one knee, on one knee — into that ditch, where my little boy was with the young woman. The woman got scared and crawled off. I says: 'At least bandage my arm!' But she crawled off...

"My Yeva also ran away then and spent the night somewhere in a haystack without any outer clothing on. She dug a little hole and crawled into the middle; into the haystack, and hid there. Later partisans came and called out, — maybe somebody was alive — for them to answer back, but people were afraid to call back. Only on the next day my little girl crawled out of the haystack and went to them...

"I'm lying in that ditch, and here two more people come running, it was Katerina's little girls.

"Oh, oh, auntie, they've killed our Mummy, and they've killed our little brother! And we were only left the two of us, two girls!..."

"And everything is dark before my eyes. I says: 'Girls, crawl along this here ditch and into the moss. Maybe you'll be left alive. When I don't speak anymore, you stay put until the Germans drive off, and then maybe someone will call out and you'll find a place to hide.'

"They ran into the moss, along the ditch. And I — now I was with that small child, with my Sasha. I got up on one knee — and crawled into the ditch, too. I got up — everything went dark before my eyes, I crawled into that moss. Quite near the house the moss was. I crept into the moss and lay there. And they, those little girls, lay low among the stumps...

"There we can hear people squealing, shrieking — they're killing people there, they are!... We had lots of young people. And maybe not one of them was left. Neither young men, nor girls, they

A stretch of the Pripyat



killed everyone. My Good, how those children were crying!... It was terrifying – if only you'd heard it. Well, it was terrifying!... They drove some people into houses, but us they just killed on our street, surrounded us and slaughtered us. And a small child... Katya's it was – they went and killed Katya, and the little child is still alive. He was crawling along, and they went and ripped up his tummy with a bayonet. And he, poor little thing, is crawling over his mother, still alive, his guts had fallen out. And he's crawling...

"They dragged my little lad, Kolya that is, onto the covered porch and he burnt up there. Only the bones were left. When I came back from the hospital, there wasn't anyone there anymore... And I found his bones there in the porch. He was a good lad..."

QUESTION: "And who were those people, Germans or police?"

"There were policemen and these Germans with those cawckades of theirs. They surrounded the village like this, sitting one next to the other, one next to the other..."

QUESTION: "Perhaps you could tell us about how you lay in the ditch?"

"I lay there, I have my little boy with me, he wants to cry and I say: 'Don't cry, or else they'll kill you, too.' He doesn't cry. They're lying there, poor things... Katya's little girls and my son. Then I began to feel a teeny bit more cheerful. I hear they've quieted down there in the village. I grabbed the children and took them, you know, to the ditch. I stepped into the water and *lifted them to the other side with my leg*, – water is running in the middle. *Carried them across on my leg*. Everything went dark before my eyes..."

"The Dubiks came and fetched me. I was as good as dead already. I was lying there wounded then, and this man picked me up and took me to the hospital.

"Had it not been for Yeremikha, they would have killed me there. At the station. And my little lad, too..."

"The little fellow was left alive, and is still alive now. He lives in Gomel. I held him in my arms then. Back when his pa left for the army and I saw him off, I also held the baby in my arms like that. And his pa carried him in his arms, he was so small. Such a little kid – and he was left alive. They shot, they shot at him so, that, believe me, the explosive bullets were burning!... I was half conscious, I looked from time to time and thought: 'Well, he's finished!...'

"And he, poor little thing, rolled along that furrow. The ploughing was deep, and he was so small..."

"They killed nearly all of us, it's only I, wounded, who was left. And I don't even know how I was left alive anyway. People ran away from me, that in the hospital already.

"It seems – I'm lying there and it seems to me my little lad is screaming. I hear – he's screaming!... I want to spring up, but I can't – my strength fails me. I want to spring up – and I fall right down. And those that are lying in the hospital look at me and are afraid, they run away from me. This one old woman was lying there, she was slightly wounded, and she, when I'd fall off the bed, she'd come and take me and put me back on the bed. She wasn't afraid. There was nothing to eat then – the Germans were there then – and I lay there just like that, on some straw. With only a kerchief. I didn't have any real clothes on me – I was dressed the way I'd been when I popped out of the house, that's the way I was dressed..."

QUESTION: "How did you get to be in that hospital? And who was this Yeremikha?"

"How'd I get to be there? There were trains there at the station, when that guy took me, and

they wouldn't let anyone through without a pass. That man is driving me, and I'm lying there wounded. And that little lad is next to me, Sasha, who was left alive. And they want to take me to the commandant's office. 'Well, I'm done for,' I think... They shout: 'Get up, woman!'

"And that man says: 'She can't get up, she's sick.'

"And there was this old granny there that was one of the Germans who had stayed on here long ago. She's dead already. And that old woman comes along just then. And she was an acquaintance of mine, she's spent the night at my house several times. She was poor and went around selling sometimes paint, sometimes something else. I never took anything from her, I just gave her potatoes or something. We lived well then. And so she'd spend the night at my house. She glanced into the cart and says: 'Who did that to you, Alyonka? Poor thing!'

"And she fell down on top of me and began to wail, clasped me and started to kiss me. She's kissing me and crying. And he asks her, the German, in German: 'Who's that?'

"And she says: 'She's a relative of mine, my family.'

"She herself was a German, she'd stayed behind back in some past war. He worked at the factory, her husband did. Worked as some kind of boss at the factory and stayed on to live here. And she spoke German. So she fell down on top of me and says: 'She's my family!...' They spoke together in German, and she says: 'Let them take her to my place.'

"And she really did take me. I was in a stupor. As soon as I can see a little bit clearly, I kiss her hands and say: 'Granny, save me!...'

"What shall I do with you!' she says. 'What shall I do with you?'

And that little lad of mine comes up and kisses

her hands: 'Oh auntie, save my mummy!'

"He was little and — poor thing — he kisses her hands.

"She ran and got Kozlovsky to bandage me up. And I had this blood all over, and it had clotted, and I was in such a bad way that I just couldn't bear it anymore. And Kozlovsky says: 'Wash her.' She really did light the stove though it was nighttime, washed me, dressed me in all her clothes and put me to bed.

"Early the next morning that German ran over to check on me, whether I was at her place or not. And she had put the bed near the stove and laid me down near the stove. He came, looked at me and talked with her. She says: 'She's in a bad way, maybe she'll even die.'

"And so they took me, and a guy drove me to the hospital, to Petrikov. And I lay there in Petrikov. And my children stayed here with someone..."

QUESTION: "What happened to you afterwards?"

"What happened? I worked on the farm, that was after our troops came, and got bonuses. And I worked for so many years! I was even summoned to Mozyr. Where haven't I been! I was even in the village Soviet — after the war I was elected a member of the village Soviet... They'd come and get me in a car.

"We started to divide up the goods among the orphans there. Well, I think that as bad as things are for me, they're just as bad for anyone else. One person said that children that belonged to those who were for the Germans were something different. But they are our children all the same, and the fact that their ma and pa are who knows where, a little kid is not to blame for that. I went and stood up for one little girl, because they were poor, they didn't have anything, and there were two of them children. And I says:

“They have to be given at least something, well, at least to cover their bodies. Because children are children, children are to be pitied, they’re not to blame.’ I stood up for them, and I’ll always stand up for children. What should they suffer for? They’re ours, the state’s children. They are brought up here, they grow up here, and they’ll be here for us.

“And I’m thankful that I can lie down and sleep in peace. Not like some people: ‘Gimme, gimme!...’ And I’m content that I can go to bed and spend a peaceful night. And I’m thankful to our state, to our soldiers that liberated us, and that I have at least some children left. Our grandchildren can also go to sleep, and I myself, kind people, can go to sleep...

“But then, lads, I didn’t sleep in a house. When the Germans were still here.

“The partisans took me into the woods, they did. I’d sit on a hummock and lament: ‘What have I been punished for like this? What am I suffering for so?...’ These, excuse me, worms appeared in my wounds. I’d take them like this with my fingers, rake them out and go and bandage myself up like this with something. They’re squirming all around, see, I can just feel how they’re swarming on me, on my arm. After all, you know, it’s live blood. And the woods, and those midges! They just descend on you, it’s impossible to sleep the night. And there are no bandages, either. You bind up your wounds with some kind of rag...

“Then our army came and set up guns, and they start to bombard Petrikov, to drive the Germans out of Petrikov. This soldier comes up to me and says: ‘What are you sitting here like that with the kids for, granny?’

“‘Just sitting,’ I says, ‘where can I go?’

“‘And why do you have ... such a shack?’

“‘Because there’s nobody to build a real one.

My husband is gone. Other people do it either with their grandfathers or their fathers. I had this grown-up lad, but he’s gone, too, joined the partisans.’

“‘You know what,’ he says, ‘There’s going to be a battle, and we’ll take you out of here.’

“And, sure enough, a cart came and they took my children and they took me, and drove us somewhere over there near Buinovichi. There was some kind of shed in the woods, and we sat in that shed. Well, what can you do, there’s nothing to eat, the children are small – what’s to be done? Soldiers were camped there before, and there were shanties there, and in those shanties were small potatoes which they fed their horses. My little girl would go and collect some of those potatoes, and we would then somehow boil up those potatoes in that dug-out. And then they threw us back even farther, that was when they fought for Petrikov. Somewhere almost all the way to the Ukraine.

“And there we stayed until they freed us completely. We were given food by people there. The people lived in shacks, there wasn’t a single house.

“And then those who were from around Petrikov were told to go home. I went to the authorities there and say I have small children, what shall I do? There are two rivers there, you know, a first one and a second, we have to get across, and I can’t. My children had caught cold, and the little girl’s leg had begun to fester, and that little lad...

“And they said: ‘We’ll send a cart for you tomorrow, ma’am.’

“They sent a cart the next day, and these Petrikov people – men, of course – came running and put their bundles in the cart and don’t let me on. But he asks for me by name, that man, and says he won’t budge from the spot until they tell him where that woman is he came for.



"He's a small child, he's rolling like a little apple..."



Alyona Bulava with her grand-daughter

“‘She was wounded and has two children, what’ll she do with them? She has two little kids, one very small and the other a little bigger. She must be taken in the cart.’

“They lifted out those bundles and took me and one other widow and drove us here. The one who drove us wasn’t a soldier, just someone appointed by the village Soviet. We were driven like that – from village Soviet to village Soviet: each village Soviet assigned a cart. And they drove us to the river, and ferried us across the river in a boat – soldiers this time.

“I came home – there was not a single house, and nowhere to go, might as well go out into the wide world. True, one young woman’s house was still left, and we gathered together in that house.

“And then people began to build houses. And I’m walking along crying. And he, some man from Petrikov, asks: ‘Why are you crying?’

“‘What do you mean, why? Those who are alive are building themselves houses, but I don’t know where I’m going. And my children. I don’t have a house...’

“And he says: ‘You know what, don’t cry. We’ll make you a house somehow. We’ll give you wood, on credit.’

“Sure enough, what’s to be said, they gave me the wood, allotted me a cartload. And so they gave it to me on credit, and later on I paid them back. And I built this little cottage...

“And the children grew up, one went to serve in the army, the other somewhere else – went their separate ways.

“And that’s the end now...

“Today, lads, I don’t go anywhere anymore, I can’t even walk across the yard. My legs hurt, and I’m hard of hearing, I’m already quite, quite ill. Good for nothing. I don’t even keep cows.

“But I’m glad that both my children and my granddaughters can go and study, and free of

charge, too, and wherever you go now, everywhere you see our people, everywhere you’re free and not afraid of anyone. With my people around I can say what I want. But the Germans, if they’d been here for a while, they would have wiped out everyone, not a soul would have been left. It’s only thanks to our soldiers and our leaders that they rooted them out of here somehow. I told them, the children, both mine and other people’s: ‘Children, stand up for this power like you would a wall, gird yourselves, watch and listen, go out and do things, and do everything right, because this is not life, but flowers.’ It’s true, it’s true!”

QUESTION: “Did you have any schooling, Alyona Ivanovna?”

“No, I’m completely uneducated...”

While we were talking that evening in the house, we were disturbed from time to time – it seemed on purpose – by the old woman’s granddaughter, the grown-up daughter of her own Yeva who had survived then and was now married somewhere rather far away. The old woman’s guest was getting ready to go somewhere and kept walking in and out of the house, but in the end she didn’t go anywhere; and there was no way we could get the girl to understand that our tape could do without the slamming of doors and the clicking of high heels as an accompaniment to her grandmother’s words.

Early the next morning, when we drove in to Sloboda from Petrikov and asked Alyona Ivanovna to repeat her story on the bench in front of the house, we were bothered by roosters, a dog, and sparrows. It is really a pity that nothing is left of these “interferences” in our transcription of the old woman’s tale. The tape is full of them: cock crow after cock crow, a sound so usual and at the same time so unusual; the lazy whining of the dog in the yard across the way, worried by the pre-

sence of our car near its fencing; the satisfied chirping of sparrows in the dewy, sun-bathed leaves of the cherry trees. The tape does not reproduce the sunshine or the dew or the odors of the rich, mellow summer. A camera cannot fully capture these things, either.

We had come here a second time mainly to photograph Alyona Ivanovna. For the old woman, who is still quite the housekeeper, it wasn't early, and she was already pottering about in the yard. But she had to wake up her granddaughter, a young schoolteacher, for us. She herself changed her clothes and told Valya to get dressed up, too. Here was another example of the people's attitude: if it must be done, it must. More likely than not the old lady did all this without at all thinking of or at least not giving too much thought to whether she'd ever see these pictures and whether she'd ever know what these people had written in their book.

Alyona Ivanovna is one of those seemingly stern but in fact just and kind women and indefatigable workers who brighten up life. One can read all this in her appearance and the expression of her eyes, severe, wise and kind, tired eyes that have looked death so close in the face...

How many times does a mother die whose children are killed in front of her eyes?

As for Valya, she turned out to be a gay young woman in the morning, who simply didn't know the cost, the importance, the meaning of what her nearest relatives had gone through, did not know what relation that fearful past bore to her youth.

We were a bit concerned that we might not have taped Alyona Ivanovna's story very well the previous evening, and at the same time we simply wanted the old woman to re-tell, amplify and explain this or that in the morning freshness. We cautiously made our request. The old woman had perhaps not slept at all after having worked herself

up late in the evening, or had not slept as much and as well as usual, but she agreed and, becoming carried away, told us everything once more, and indeed, in a more orderly and precise fashion. In transferring them to paper from the tape, we synthesized her two accounts, retaining everything essential.

The last thing Alyona Ivanovna told us was not an answer to some question of ours. It was the voice of her soul, purified by suffering, the clear and concise resolution of bitter and persistent meditation. The little boy who, under fire by adults excellently armed and trained to kill, had run and rolled along the deep furrow, returned into his mother's heart again for the umpteenth time in thirty years, sprang to life before her eyes...

"...I feel frightened just thinking of it..."

"I lived during those past wars, when those wars went on. I wasn't young anymore. Well, sometimes they'd take pigs, sometimes something else... At least from an animal you can run away, up some pine tree or something. But these are people. A person will find another person, nose him out somewhere.

"Oh, just what was this! — it was not war, but just... Well, those that are at the front, well, they go and kill those people — but they were fighting, weren't they? But what about a poor little child? A little boy and he, poor thing, hasn't been anywhere. They killed them, too... This little child is running — what do they want to kill him for? He's little, he's small child, he's rolling like a little apple... And they — shoot at him. Sparks are flying!..."

"What was it, what had made them like this? — I don't know.

"They were wild beasts, not people.

"They weren't people, they were — beasts..."

It Was Awful There in the Earth

"...**Ivanova, Akulina Semyonovna**, 1908, Byelorussian, family relationship — mother. Tongue pierced through twice, ate a handful of sand and was beaten in the head, but survived and herself crawled out of the pit where she had been buried."

This is an excerpt from the "List of Rudnya families who perished at the hands of the nazis", drawn up by the Rudnya village Soviet and signed: "Commissar of the Chapaev part. detachment Drozdov. 8/8, 1942."

A note added a quarter of a century later reads: "The original of the list can be found in the Party archives of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Byelorussia, stack 3904, bundle 1, file 1, schedule 1, page 15."

We noticed this document in the "Museum of People's Glory" in the village of Rossony, Vitebsk Region.

"...They interrogated and beat them there. They were all covered with bruises... They killed her older boy, then her younger son in her arms, then her, third. And she got out of the pit by herself. She felt there was little sand on top, felt she'd get out, and started to move her legs, move her legs — and crawled out of the pit. But she couldn't go any farther. She just lay there next to the pit. She was afraid that maybe the Germans were in the village, and she simply couldn't go any farther. Then they brought her to us, laid her on the floor. She began to vomit so hard: just green stuff and sand..."

"And the next night the Germans came back to our village again. An expedition came. And she had lost consciousness, she started to scream... It rained so hard that night! A whole bunch of people had gathered in our house. She's unconscious and screaming: 'Ow-ow-ow!' And Mummy and

I tell her to quiet down, not to scream — there are Germans all around. We stop up her mouth.

"And the Germans are standing around the house — only their helmets clank against the walls. It's pouring something awful. And we can't go out into the yard. And they, the swine, don't ask to be let into the house. Not one of them knocked. They stand there quietly, we only hear: 'Gar, gar, gar!' And bang their helmets against the walls..."

The above is an excerpt from the account of **Alyona Grigoryevna Zharchenko**, a relative of Akulina Ivanova's who lives in the village of Rudnya, Rossony District. It is here that we found out the present address of the resurrected woman: the village of Baranovo near Polotsk.

From the front porch of the large and well-weathered wooden apartment-building one has a view of a wide, green valley, thickly covered by a still short growth of alders and willow-bushes. One divines the presence of water in the thicket — a brook or simply wet ground.

"You have lots of nightingales around here."

Although it was already June, the nightingales escorted us like a many-voiced chorus from village to village in each district of this verdant and lake-filled Vitebsk Region.

"If anything that's one thing we don't lack," the woman answered.

From the district centre we had phoned Akulina Semyonovna at the invalids' home not far from here where she works as an attendant. Today was her day off, and she met us on the path some distance away from the house where she lives.

The lone woman's cramped, clean little room contained a sewing machine, bed, wardrobe, small table and large mirror. There was not much space for five people to move around in. "Sit down over

"Do not be soft and sentimental"—one of the Twelve Commandments for Germans in the East... Akulina Ivanova felt the effects of this...





here, my bed is clean." But only one of us, with the tape-recorder, sat down at the table. Akulina Semyonovna remained standing, too, although it would have been right for her to sit down on the edge of her fluffy bed.

She tells her story, obviously not daring to show her tears. Even when describing how her children were shot, she speaks in an almost restrained voice.

"...My husband was in the detachment. We would collect milk and cart it to the detachment. And we had just come back from the detachment. We all carried milk to the partisans. We had taken some there and come home. And I had only just started to light the stove when Shchedrov, our neighbour, comes running and says: 'The Germans are coming!' Then I quickly carried some things out of the house, and then the shooting started.

"And they went around along the edge of the woods, those Germans, and the shooting started. And we came out of the woods then and headed for the double-track section. We sat down there, lay there, and the Germans immediately surrounded us. They went and drew us up.

"'Well then,' they say, 'well then, if your husbands are not with the partisans, then the partisans will shoot at you, but if they are with the partisans, then they won't shoot at you.'

"The partisans stopped firing. Their machine-guns there got out of order or something. The shooting died down.

"So the Germans herded us away...

QUESTION: "Where did you say they drew you up?"

"Right where the double-track section is. And they drew us up right like this, on the side, at the edge of the road. So the partisans would see us.

And they themselves are standing there. And Poltorenko. He hugged and kissed one of them who had a big cockade... Who's Poltorenko? He pegged out not long ago. It was him who sold us to the Germans. He was from our village, used to be the trackman here.

"And so they herded us into Rudnya. And drove us into the bathhouse. And we sat in there.

"They started to interrogate us. Well then, those they interrogated they'd take out there and begin flogging them. The flogging went on in Osipov's house. My sister was there, too. They caught my sister the next day in the field and brought her in. And they rounded up all the cows, took them away. They interrogated one woman, interrogated another and let them go. Well, we think, they'll let us all go. We can see out of the window in the bathhouse. And then they ran after them and brought them back. Then they summoned Dyubenchikha. Each family separately. And flogged them with a lash. They summoned Dyubenchikha, they summoned Sharpenchikha, they summoned Bykhovtsova... Each family separately. And — they don't come back. They summon them — and they don't come back... Then I had to go with my kids. They summoned me."

QUESTION: "How old were your children?"

"One boy was born in thirty-three, the other in thirty-seven. Well, and as soon as they'd summoned me there, into the house, they immediately said: 'Say where your husband is!'

"I says: 'He was called up in the first mobilization.'

"'Speak, you, partisan scum! Where were you today?'

"'Nowhere,' I says, 'I cooked some food for the kids, washed some laundry. I didn't go anywhere.'

"'Speak at once!...'

"He grabbed me by the hair and threw me to

the ground. Started to thrash me. They brought a jar of sand, this big jar of dry sand.

"Eat it," he says, "you, partisan bitch!"

"They poured it onto the table. And I ate that sand. It was dry, wouldn't go down. There was manure there and everything. There's no way I can eat it. And all the same I ate it — I was choking, couldn't breathe. I ate it all up. He started to thrash my head like mad with the lash.

"Lick it clean, you, dog, lick up that sand."

"I licked it up with my tongue. Then: 'Stick out your tongue! Onto the table!'

"I'm standing there like that, and he tugs away at my head by the hair. Then pulled out my tongue and started to pierce it with a big needle. Everything just went numb, I didn't feel anything... Then — my hair... One twisted, then the other twisted my hair — how they tugged at it, how they tugged at it!... They tore all the hair from my head. Then they laid me down, one of them stepped on my head, the other on my feet and they started to flog me with lashes. They flogged and flogged me... They would have flogged me to death just like my sister and Dyubenchikha... But they brought them something to eat. Bread spread with butter and these mess-tins. They grabbed up that food and went out into the street.

"And a German dragged us to the shed. He dragged us right up to it and motions to us — he covered us with sacking and rags and motions to us: don't get up. And he himself went off and didn't come back for some time.

"He comes leading a horse. This great big horse. They start leading it over the people, to trample them. The kids — with that horse... An officer brought it, the interpreter. A German.

"But people say: 'You're doing wrong ... mister interpreter.'

"Why," he says, "am I doing wrong?"

"My husband was called up in the first mobilization... What are you punishing us so for?..."

"Then the interpreter started to look how people were lying — who was alive. It was already rather late. And those polizeis... They sure had their fun with us!... First of all they took Lida Bykhovtsova and dragged her along. And stuck her boy with a bayonet. And they threw them right into the pit — and shot them. Well, and then came Sharpenchikha. Then Dyubenkina's family. And Dyubenkina's daughter was there, she was called Yanina, sixteen years old she was. A German came, an officer, and says: 'If you agree to be with me, you'll live, but if you don't agree, we'll kill you.'

"And she goes: 'Kill me!' She huddled up behind her mother, who was already dead. 'I'm not going anywhere!...'

"Then they took them to the pit and shot them.

"And now my older boy is going... And I couldn't feel with my legs any more whether I was walking over the earth or sky. I'm burning all over, all covered with lash-marks, my hair is all torn out, my tongue swole up. They lead us to the pit. And my older boy calls out: 'Don't shoot, dear sirs!'

"And the younger one... I was carrying him in my arms... I don't remember anything more... I found myself in the pit. There was just a flash, this fire... He shot my older son first, then me, then the younger boy... Well, then they buried us — I don't remember anything, but I hear — the sand at first goes sh-sh, sh-sh, sh-sh... They started to throw in sand. Ants crawled into my mouth and nose. It was awful there in the earth. They buried us, I heard them leave — stomp-stomp, stomp-stomp...

"That I seemed to remember. But how I got out and crawled off a ways, like from here to that little house — I remember nothing about it.

I remember that when I got out I thought: 'I'll crawl over and drown myself in the stream.' That I remember. But then, when I'd collapsed, I'd raise my head – and couldn't go on. I didn't know, see, that I'd been shot. I don't remember anything. They say I was shot through: I was shot here in the back of the head, and the bullet came out.

"They flew in that ... doctor from behind the front line, to the Selyavshchina airfield. Uh-huh. I only got back my memory on the ninth day. The woman at whose place I stayed, Beljkova, told me that.

"Well, when the Germans left, the partisans came here. And I crawled off, a ways, lay down, and a pool of blood, people say, collected there... I was lying in that blood. I hear someone starts to speak. From Sosni, this man who lived there. Vashen was their last name, the Vashnyovs. The old man ran up and says: 'Some woman is lying here, a dead woman. Semyonovna! Collective farmers, over here!'

"They came running. And I heard his voice, raised myself up backward like this – I hit against the ground and blood poured out from my mouth, from my ears – all over. They lifted me up on some rags and carried me to the Beljkovs' house.

"It's only afterwards they sent for the doctor. My husband came from his detachment – sent for him. That doctor came and got the sand out of me. Both vomit and sand came out. He got everything out – both sand and water... He put something on those wounds on my tongue, then here, on this wound... Nurses came from the detachment so the wound wouldn't fester. But my head kept going bom-bom-bom... No ways it would stop. And he came later, opened my skull, and there was blood on the membrane of the brain, and he took out that blood with some kind of little spoon. When he'd removed the blood from the

membrane..."

QUESTION: "You say the doctor flew in from behind the front line?"

"To Selyavshchina, to the airfield. They wanted to fly me behind the front line. But the surgeon says: 'To save yourself, you need a pail of poppy-seeds and honey mixed together. You must grind the poppy-seeds, pound and grind them with the honey and eat it. You've lost all your blood. Then you'll get well and be able to leave your bed. But if you don't use this... They won't give it to you behind the front line. Wartime.'

"So then. That's how I got well. The inhabitants brought me a pail of poppy-seeds within a day, and we had our own honey, we had our own bees. That's what. I got back my memory only on the ninth day and started to eat that, and only got back on my feet after four months. There..."

Afterwards, Akulina Ivanova gave us something to eat, once again quiet and kind, and went out to invite our driver to join us in this ceremonial strengthening of the good feelings aroused by our meeting, perhaps the only one in all our lives.

Lilac bushes were flowering near the front steps where the green valley started, but the nightingales were not to be heard when we left the house. It may have been because the midday sun had entirely dispersed the thick fog which had covered the area after the previous day's rain, or because it was, after all, the middle of June, or because they simply happened to be taking a rest.

But was it pure chance or something natural that Akulina Semyonovna Ivanova survived, was resurrected, to the undoing of the nazi butchers against whom she later testified at two trials, and to the inordinate horror-filled joy of people who love goodness?

The Final Kiss

Lyubov Semyonovna Ivanova is seventy-five and lives in the village of Gorbachevo, Rossony District, Vitebsk Region.

"...My husband wasn't with the partisans, he was at the front...

"Is it here I have to speak? (*She indicates the microphone.*) Just speak and that's all? I'll just speak then.

"There was a time when the enemy came into the village. Before that we had cried and grieved but lived where we were, but when the enemy came, Lyda and I — she was a friend of mine — went into the woods. We wandered about the woods. She was a schoolteacher. She had two children, and I just had Vitya.

"Here they gathered everyone, shot and hung people...

"When I came back from hiding, it was written on my house: 'Partisan, bandit house'. Just like that it was written, sonny! Zhenya, my oldest son, came home from the partisans and hewed it away with an axe: it couldn't be erased, and it was ugly written on the house, at the doorstep.

"They assembled people here and shot them...

"They took seven people in my brother's family: my brother, my sister-in-law and their three daughters, and their little grandson... I had a sister, they took her, too. They were the bosses here, and they shot and burned people...

"There was a pit right here, and a pit there. People dug the pits for their own selves. And then they shot down the line with a machine-gun.

"There were seventy people there. When we came back from the woods we dug them up and moved them to the cemetery."

QUESTION: "And how did you wander around the woods with your friend and your children?"

"We just wandered, sonny, just wandered... I'll tell you everything. Kanashonki is not far away from us. My oldest lad comes running. In the evening. He was only just fifteen, and they had admitted him into the partisans. He says: 'Mummy, the Germans have arrived in Kanashonki!...'

"Now he's buried up near Alitus. And he was called Zhenya. Zhenya Yegorovich Ivanov. He got almost up to Alitus, and there they killed him. I've already travelled to his grave twice...

"Well, back then my son said: 'Mummy, the Germans are in Kanashonki!'

"We collected our clothes. He harnessed the horse and drove us into the woods, into the swamp. My friend Lyda and I dug a dug-out and stayed in that dug-out for a week. And what about grub? We had some buried potatoes. But there was snow all over! At night we'd go get those potatoes from the pit. We boiled them there. Later we went at night to look around the village. There wasn't anyone. We came the two of us, Lyda and I, to the village. She had two kids, and I had my one, Vitya. We left the children in the dug-out and went by ourselves. We walk around the village. There isn't a soul, only a big, big bull, and with a chain. He'd broken the chain. I glanced into the shed, I'd left my sheep in there. Nothing. The house was untouched. We looked and left. Well, tomorrow, we decided, we'll go home again. With the children this time. There isn't anyone — there won't be any Germans.

"We spent the night in the dug-out. What sleep can you have there on the damp ground? We didn't have anything there. Just some old rag maybe. Early in the morning we got out of there and went home.

"She had this tiny little house there. It had been the medic's louse exterminator, and she, Lyda, later came from Vitebsk and lived there.

And we made some kind of soup. And then we glance out: the snow is white as white can be, and you can see people walking along like this – like a black cloud, one person next to the other like from this wall to that. They drove along the road, and then we have a lake there, and they're walking along that lake – real close packed!...

"We'd just entered the house and sat down. If they'd found us there in the woods in the dug-out – that would have been the end of us.

"We stayed sitting there in the house, and our soup and everything was all left there. And those kids were hungry. We didn't even want to eat anymore. And we sit there...

"A polizei comes in. And she had galoshes, they were wet and she'd put them on the stove to dry. He takes the galoshes and hides them under his coat. We don't say anything. Uh-huh. He put them under his overcoat, and right then a German comes in.

"Mudder, mudder, mudder!... Do you have any partisan here?"

"We don't have any partisan."

"Were you' – he speaks pure Russian – 'were you already checked?"

"And we're sitting there quaking: both she and I have a son in the detachment..."

"And they just left us and went off into the woods.

"That polizei got scared when the German came. He covered up those galoshes a bit. And we don't say a word.

"Then we look out the window and see our people coming from over that way. Women and old men in carts with children... They had already been, you know – checked. They're coming and coming... Horses and cows and people are coming. And I says: 'Well, Lyda Ivanovna, we'll go together with them.'

"My little boy was real sick with the bloody

flux. He needed hot meals, he couldn't do without hot meals. He'd got so weak. But hers, Lyda's kids, were healthier. I'm holding my son by the hand and don't know what to do with him... This woman, Anyuta Stepanikha, comes along then. She lives somewhere there in Latvia now. And I take the little boy up to her and say: 'Anyuta, take my Vitya. Maybe I'll lose my life here. I,' I says, 'am just going to run for my life. People who were checked are on their way, and we'll go along behind them as though we'd been checked. Lyda is going with her kids, but mine is dropping...'

"And she, that Anyuta I mean, had a daughter, a girl of about sixteen. And my partisan, my Zhenya, and that girl – they, when they went to school, they were friends. Klavdya was her name, God grant her a long life. When I said that to her mother, her mother didn't say anything, but that Klavdya came up, took my Vitya by the hand and led him into the house. He had the bloody flux, he couldn't walk any more...

"The snow!... And where are we to go? We don't know. And I get up – and just fall to the ground: the child – he was the apple of my eye, and he was left here... She, however, my friend Lyda, took me by the arm.

"Get a move on somehow, get a move on somehow!..."

"And we went this way here... There was a street going right from there, we went down that street and onto the high road. Germans are riding by and riding by from the opposite direction on horseback. They're carting wardrobes and pigs and sheep from the direction of Starina. Starina is burning, and Kuleshovo is burning – everything, everything is burning!... And we're walking from here against the stream.

"And there was a polizei from our village. Well, not a polizei, but he wasn't Soviet either. He was



Beyond Lake Neshcherda lies Gorbachevo, the native village of Lyubov Ivanova



Memorial to nazi victims in Alexichi

the only thing I was afraid of. No one knows me here, but he knows me. Well, I think, if he sees me, I'm done for...

"And we have to go. Yes, it's better to go than to completely fall into their hands, to end up on some gallows. We go. We go the two of us. She has her kids with her, and we're walking along. She led me by the arm a bit, because I just couldn't: because I'd left my child... And the horses are coming thick as flies, one behind the other, one sleigh behind the other. Some people are walking, others are riding. Leading cows. But no one will take us in their sleigh. And I push along the sleighs — like one of them!... (*She laughs.*) And they won't take Lyda's kids in their sleighs either... And the Germans and the polizeis keep riding by and riding by in the opposite direction. They keep riding by, thick as flies, and we're going in the opposite direction. We came up there near Baidino, and they stop us:

"'Were you checked?'

"'We were.'

"'You, don't have any partisans?'

"'No.'

"'Well, then you can go.'

"We turned back. They're walking away from here, and we go that way toward the village.

"What snowdrifts there were! All that snow!... We came out onto the lake. Maria Koldubei says to our face: 'They'll shoot us because of you. Don't you go with us.'

"They went in that direction, and we — we ourselves don't know where to go... With that young woman, and two children, too. Well, what's to be done. I had on a sheepskin coat, and on my head — sort of, you know, without realizing it — a white sheet. And all that snow!... I says: 'Well, Lyda Ivanovna, we'll stay here in this snow!...'

"Evening is already falling. We walked almost up to Veruselimka and sat down there. And the

little girl wants to sleep. The boy was about twelve, and the girl, about ten. We sat down like this the two of us together, next to each other. Then that little girl... She'd just changed her shoes, taken these here felt boots off her and put ankle boots on. I took that little girl — pressed her head against me, and she took her legs. And then the boy sat down in a clump with us. We covered ourselves with the sheet — I took it off my head. And we, you know, had got to the lake, we had to cross the lake, the forest was not far from there. Well, and we're sitting there. We sit there. That little girl is dozing, and she keeps thumping her sides. And you know — we were sitting in the snow and didn't catch cold...

"Later we got up — we go across the lake. We were all wet, and then we froze over, we walk along and everything on us crackles. She took the little girl by the hand, but the little boy walks by himself. We crossed the lake — there's a narrow copse there, and a forester lives in there. We go to that forester's. We're walking through the woods, and when the Germans send off a rocket — it's light as light can be! — we stand still. And when it gets dark, we go on.

"We got there, and not far away from there is his bathhouse, we'll go into that bathhouse, because maybe there are Germans in the house, we don't know. We stood there and stood there — it had got completely dark now. We went into the bathhouse. And we ourselves — everything was all wet. Lord, need I say what a misfortune!... (*She starts crying, and one of her neighbours, to calm her, asks: 'In whose bathhouse was that?'* 'In whose,' she answers — 'The forester's.') We look and see an armful of wood lying there. And I had bought matches, in the summer, back on Whitsunday, and sewn them like this in my jacket. And this was already when — in winter — and I was still carrying that matchbox on me. And

we're all set to heat the bathhouse, there's plenty of wood. And our door exactly faced the window of the forester's house. 'Well,' we say, 'if there are Germans there and we light the stove, it's not very far away...' But God granted there weren't any Germans at their place. At the forester's. Well then – we lit the stove. I close the door. The kids fell asleep on the ground. The wood wouldn't burn. I damaged my eyes, the smoke made my eyes smart. But that wood only smouldered. It warmed the bathhouse a little bit. The wood smouldered to ashes, and we left this little hole for the smoke to go through. Well, then we carried the kids from the ground onto the shelves, she lay down next to them and I just lay down on the stove – it was warm, on the stove – all wet, and we fell asleep.

"Well, and the next day God granted snow to have fallen all around that bathhouse. We had to get up and go to that man. I says: 'Lyda Ivanovna, if there aren't any Germans, we'll open up that little hole and we'll be able to see that there aren't any tracks, that they didn't walk around here.'

"We sat and sat and looked and looked – nothing... (*She cries.*)

"Well, we get going. Sure enough, there aren't any Germans. Anyuta was sitting there on the covered porch, that forester's sister... (*She cries.*) They poured us a bowl of cabbage soup and potatoes. We'd been without eating for three days maybe. There were some peas: Lyda took a bit of peas, and the kids chewed on them there.

"And in Skarbuny they had killed the women. And they'd left Skarbuny. And my eyes are smarting and tearing, I can't see anything. We came to Skarbuny. And the girls are crying there: they didn't kill the young girls, they only killed the old women. Then I asked for some soap. They gave me some and I thoroughly washed my eyes.



Alyona Bondarchuk

Then we went to Veratino. We came to Veratino – the shutters are just flapping away at my brother's. I went into the house, but there's nobody there, it's empty: they'd killed everyone... Oh!...

"Well then... My heart, sonny, is pounding: one child, the apple of my eye, and he was left there... Vitya. If I could see him now – I would just kiss him – and that would be all... And I... wouldn't be afraid... (*She cries.*)

"Her kids are with her.

"And I went off alone. I go and don't know where I'm going... I go to Gorbachevo. I came there and met this person. He says: 'Don't go, Semyonovna, they're celebrating Purim* there just now. Don't go, no way. You'll get caught, a real massacre is going on there now...'

"I came to the pine grove and stand there. And what am I standing there for?...

"Then I met my sister. My own sister, who's already dead. I told her what house my little lad was in. Then she went, took the little fellow and came back again. And so it was, God granted, that the German didn't do anything – the sentry that was standing there didn't say anything to her, and she walked by. When I laid my eyes on my little son – well, I had everything now!...

"And that son is my only one. The one that was in the detachment – that one was killed. But this one works in Kovali as a work superintendent. (*She cries.*) Victor Yegorovich Ivanov...

II

Alyona Khalimonovna Bondarchuk is sixty-two and lives in the village of Alexichi, Khoiniki District, Gomel Region.

* Jewish religious holiday on which it is customary to give people gifts.

"...They caught up with me in my kitchen-garden. They came, my dears, around eleven. I had a small child, a little lad. He's peacefully sleeping, and the oldest girl was minding him. I wanted to breast-feed the baby. Then I grabbed up the child and ran. I'm running, and along drives my neighbour with her father-in-law and yells at me: 'Alyona, Alyona!...' And the Germans are already coming. Their vehicles are humming. People started to run, and I see, I see a house has caught on fire at the end of the village. I ran there with my father-in-law after me. My older children were home. I'm running, and some grey car driving along, and two Germans in black hats are sitting in it. They turned near the oak tree, drove into the village, stopped and ran out. Then I see they've aimed their rifles at someone. And so I called out: Stas, they're going to kill you!...'"

QUESTION: "Did they surround the village?"

"Mercy me, I didn't see anything. I only saw those two. I only saw how they aimed their rifles.

"And my little children all ran to me. Other people's children, people said, fell asleep, but mine all ran to me. I had one little lad who was six months old, another who was about three, and one of the neighbour's, too, and I'm crawling with them, and then when I look back – the Germans are coming after me. They aimed their rifles and are coming, coming... I wanted to crawl into the hemp. But the bullets are whistling: this way and that, this way and that... My older lad fell down and screams: 'Ah, Mummy, Mummy, there's blood on you there!...'"

"And I see I'm lying in the sand, and there's lots of sand in my mouth, and then I see that they've wounded the little lad, and his hat has flown off his head. And I see that he was all rosy, but his little lips are already quite, quite yellow, and he can't speak. And the younger one, when

I fell with him I heard how something wheezed in his chest. It wheezed – and that’s all. He was gone...

“And those bullets keep on whistling. I was wounded as I crawled, but I don’t know what bullet it was. I never saw such a thing in all my life, now they went woosh-woosh, here and there all around me, and I can’t see where they’re from. Because I was crawling. But when I lift my head I see those two are coming after me, still shooting...

“And then – it was all over: I didn’t get up, and my little lads had died. He walked up to me, took me by the arm above the elbow – my head was lifted a bit – let me fall smack onto the ground, and the blood runs out of me. And they looked at me and left.

“I raised myself a bit just to kiss my little lad over the furrow, but I already lacked the strength...

“Well, I see it all – just as if it were today, though so much time has passed since then – how he’s lying and his little hat has fallen off...

“I hear the house is burning, the fire is crackling. The whole village was already burning. Then I hear the neighbour shouting to my mother:

“‘Ma’am, they ran over thataways!’

“And my mother came running to me. She’s running and wailing. And I wasn’t conscious of anything more.

“Later my mother and my sisters said how I wanted to kiss him over the furrow, but I just can’t, I couldn’t get up... I only remember how they took me in a wagon over the furrows, how I was shaken. And they also say I crawled into the wagon myself, because they came for me, my brothers and mother, and came for my children,

too. Another woman here says that when they took me with the children, blood was running all over the place...

“And one woman said that when they were killing them my eldest girl begged very hard for mercy: ‘Oh, don’t kill me, don’t kill me, I don’t have a pa!...’

“She was born in nineteen thirty, twelve years old she was. I had four children then, and my father-in-law made five, my husband’s father, and I made six. They killed all the children, and wounded my father-in-law and me. I escaped by a hair. I don’t know how I didn’t choke: I didn’t have any breath left. It was so scary, so scary!... Especially because it was so close, and he even came up and took me by the arm. I don’t know which arm, maybe this one, because I was crawling along like this with the baby...

“Then everyone was afraid: as soon as the Germans came into the village, everyone left it!...

“But they only pierced my skull, my dears... One wound still hasn’t healed to this day. At the time bits of bone came out for a whole year.

“My brothers made me a little house, and later on, when my husband came back from the front, he added on some more buildings.

“And now, my dears, I can’t tell you anything more. I’m illiterate, and after they shot me I lost all what sense I had. It’s only that I have a good husband to run the household, but I have little to do with it. After the war I had three more children. The children have scattered over the world, and the old man and I live by ourselves. My old man is away today, he’s not home.”

QUESTION: “How many people did they kill in Alexichi?”

“Mercy me, I can’t tell you. People say, about seven hundred supposingly...”

Action, Operation, Expedition

If one drives into Grodno Region from Vitebsk Region or the Polesye, it strikes one as a settled place, abounding in fields. The only forests left here grow along the Niemen and its tributaries. The Beryoza is enveloped in the Nalibokskaya Woods, while the right bank of the Shchara marks the start of the Lipichanskaya Woods. Starting from Slonim, oak groves stretch along this bank, sometimes in a thin ribbon, sometimes in wide strips. Farther from the channel the oaks become mixed with pines and spruces and form fine forests, which break up into small clumps of woods only on the approaches to settlements, or sink into swamps and become dwarf stands of birch and pine withering in brakes of wild rosemary.

There are few settlements here, except for a small village or two with the meaningful name of Velikaya or Malaya Volya (Great and Little Freedom), which are nestled at the very edge of the stream and were once a lure for serfs and troublesome rebel souls who were unbearably oppressed by the Polish landowners and were drawn to this backwoods to escape their sway. These villages give way to others with more down-to-earth names, all strung along the right bank of the Shchara, which throws up only yellow sand and reddish dross on that side. The sandy spits formed by the river stretch like deserts for dozens of kilometres and are overgrown in patches by squat pines. The fertile silt and clay have been deposited to the left, and from times of old the Shchara's left bank has been densely populated and cultivated, dotted with fields and meadows, villages, townships and farms, as though someone had haphazardly scattered these settlements and their houses, clubs, schools, shops, individual sheds, cellars, barns and collective-farm cowsheds, pigsties, parking lots, workshops and storehouses along the valley. The peasants' private dwellings are as modest as an ancient folktale, while the

public collective- and state-farm buildings are of a scale commensurable with the country and times.

At one time the tree-filled villages of Vasilevichi, Pavlovichi, Niz and Ostrov blended harmoniously with the landscape, with the huge oaks, limes and maples on their outskirts and at the forks in their roads; these trees were remnants of the sacred pagan groves, mediators in the age-old war between Polevik, god of the fields, and Lesovik, god of the woods. Today these and other such villages are being built up neatly according to plans.

At the turn of the century the world-famous student of folklore Mikhal Fedorovsky lived and worked in this area. In the surrounding villages he collected the Byelorussian folk songs, tales, popular beliefs and proverbs which make up the seven bulky volumes of his "Lud bialoruski", a precious addition to Slavic folklore.

This is a hilly country. The road from Slonim lies some distance away from the stream, sometimes one, sometimes two or even three kilometres to the side, running straight across knolls and valleys, probably all the way to the Niemen (somewhere near Orlya). To someone driving along this road it can sometimes seem as though he's looking at the Shchara from above, such is the impression made by the unusually winding bed the river has carved out for itself over the ages.

One feels like stopping on each hillock to marvel at how well and harmoniously man and nature can live and create together when they create in accordance with the laws of reason, conscience and beauty.

The road is always busy here. Day and night it observes life's troubles, joys and hopes. As on some giant tape, the events of the day are recorded on it. Everything leaves its mark: the tires of trucks returning one after the other from Slonim

to the countryside for the night, of cars, motorcycles and tractors; the fellows of a creaking wagon bringing green fodder to the farm; the squeaky wheels of a pram which a happy young mother has taken out into the village street on a quiet afternoon for the first time in her life...

...Here in the winter of 1942 up and down the Shchara from Slonim, the road witnessed events of such horror that it no longer knew whether it was leading to this world or the next, and even if it could talk it would be unable to tell us about these events intelligibly, but, like the people who witnessed them and whose voices we recorded, before rendering them here in letters and words, would turn to us for explanations of what happened.

One of the accounts we taped here was that of **Pyotr Iosifovich Savchits** from the village of Garodki.

"...How, you say, did the day start for me? They came to us on Saturday, the Germans. It was called action against partisans...

"...The Germans come. And they immediately cordoned off the village: they set up a machine-gun here, then set one up there, too – cordoned it off all around. The village headman goes around with the Germans and summons people to go have their passports checked. And you just had to, without fail, take your family list along with you from home. You see, then it was the rule that there had to be a list of your family over the doorway. People started to gather where they said to. They carried out a table and put a bench there. To check the passports, I mean.

"I myself also went up. And I'd forgotten that list, hell knows why. I tell the headman: 'I forgot my list.'

"And the German says in Polish: 'Let him go get it.'

"I came home and got that list. There was some tobacco in a tin can on the table. I took it with me. My grandmother was a hundred years old, she'd stayed in bed. I roll a cigarette and say: 'Granny, they'll probably kill us, won't they?'

"And she tells me: 'My darling grandson, run into the woods!'

"Really and truly. But how can you? If I go, they'll kill those others over there...

"I came there, and that cordon that was there started to come together. As soon as it started to come together, all the young people – whee! – took to their heels. Only the old people were left. And the German came out and says in Polish: 'What are you doing, stupid people? What are you running away for? Who's going to kill you? An inspection is going on.'

"And the headman's brother says: 'Maybe we'll do even worse. Come here, come back.'

"And they started to go back.

"As they started to go back that German takes people's passports and carries them to the table. They unrolled a piece of paper on the table and he crosses out something there with a pencil, on the paper. Who knows what it was.

"The German, when he'd taken away all our passports, asked the headman in Polish: 'Will there be vacant flats for us to spend the night in?'

"There will be.'

"As soon as he said 'will be'... the German quickly took two steps back and the soldiers started to shoot at everyone – at both the people and the headman. The Germans had agreed on it among themselves. Instead of a command.

"There was this praying cripple, she fell to her knees and started to cross herself and sing. Nothing helped...

"I managed to run out of there, to reach the stream, and went crawling along the bank. They wounded me – I'd run off about a hundred and

fifty metres. But they killed my wife. My father and sister were also left there killed..."

In the villages of Boroviki and Okuninovo, which are a little ways upstream from Slonim, they carried out the same "action" in a different, more selective way. They started to exterminate people on the Okuninovo farmsteads before any partisan detachments had even had time to get organized. Local resident **Ivan Ignatovich Rubets** shared his recollections with us.

"...They started from that end, right the way you came, from Slonim, and herded everyone to this end of the village. They went from house to house, looked for where people were hidden; there were even old men and women who couldn't walk – they finished them off inside..."

"There was this man... I can't tell you whether he was Russian or German, or Polish – well, of course, he was in German uniform. And he asked the people: 'Maybe you have somebody in Germany? Maybe some of you handed over supplies to the Germans?'

"And he went and let a few families go that way. Understand? From that crowd.

"Then some SS man rolled up in a car from Byten. This tall, robust man. He cut it short – no one was to go anywhere. No papers or certificates.

"They herded us back maybe seventy metres or so from the road toward the orchard. And first of all they laid down two men: one old man and another ... he was a prisoner of war who'd got left behind. There were many of them in the village. He wasn't a sponger, the citizen just didn't have anywhere to go. He was good and strong, he'd worked as the hammerman until then. They were somehow standing at the edge, our old man and that prisoner of war. They went and laid them on

the ground and shot them there.

"When they shot them down, the crowd saw what kind of business this was and dashed every which way. But ambushes had been set there all around the orchard and all around the village, machine-guns were set up.

"Wherever you went, you met them everywhere.

"Not one of those who tried to run off got away.

"I was holding a child, a little girl about two years old. I was wounded in the arm, right here. The child fell out of my arms. I ran off some seven or eight metres maybe. There was this old pit there. I fell into that pit. And a girl from Okuninovo fell in with me and came down so heavily that I didn't know whether she was alive or not. I asked: 'Marusya, are you alive?'

"And she answered: 'I'm alive!'

"Keep quiet then, keep quiet! If you're alive, don't budge."

"And another one fell down on this side, also a grown-up girl. I didn't know she was alive, too. If I'd known, I'd have warned her, too. When it all grew quiet... They were going around finishing people off. Now they're coming up to us. He comes up and kicks her one in the side. She bore it without moving... He stepped on me and went over to the other one. He hit that lass and she screamed: 'O,' she says, 'dear sir, I'll tell you something!'

"O, so you'll tell me something!'

"And he began to abuse her. In Russian. And he shot her in the forehead with a pistol. And went on.

"In the morning the Germans came, collected those they'd let go and made them dig a grave and take all the bodies to the pit and cover them with earth.

"We had had farmsteads, and a year earlier they had not shot people there, but herded one or two

families into a house and set it on fire. Burnt them alive. As many farmsteads as there were, they set them all on fire with their inhabitants. All the farmsteads at once.

"With us it was on December twenty-two, nineteen forty-two, and they burnt the farmsteads in the winter of forty-one..."

We heard about the tragedy of the little village of Boroviki from **Maria Grigoryevna Kulak**, a talkative woman with a retentive memory, who described everything with the exactitude of a legal statement: the selection process and the shooting and her own certitude that she had been subjected to all this suffering because back in the days of the Polish landowners when she was an adolescent she had become drawn to the Young Communist League and Soviet power, which was somewhere far away there, beyond the Polish-Soviet border, and had hidden Sergei Pritytsky * when he was in the underground.

"...Well, we got up early — we see we're surrounded, there's nowhere to run. We sit in the house, and they started to go from house to house and drive people out for the meeting. They came in and said: 'With the children! Everyone with the children!'

"Very well then, we ready ourselves and go to at meeting. And they draw us up right here where the grave now is, all in a row. And he walks down the line and asks in Polish: 'Where's your husband?'

"Well, some say: 'He's standing right there.' He reached me, and he, my Anton, had gone to

* *Sergei Osipovich Pritytsky* (1913–1971)—renowned West Byelorussian underground fighter who subsequently became a party leader and statesman.

his sister's, seven kilometres away, gone to thresh rye. And I had a baby who was four months old. I says so.

"'When?' he asks in Polish.

"'Yesterday,' I say. (He'd gone the day before yesterday, but I said yesterday.)

"'But no, they didn't throw me out of that row.

"'Then they called out the activists, those who were for Soviet power. The activists with their families, all of them.

"'Go over to that side!'

"'It got to be my turn.

"'Activist Kulak, Anton Romanovich! Cross over with your kin!'

"I cross over there with the baby. I stand there. They join all of us to the partisan families. And the machine-guns are all standing there! Those people — how they started to cry! In all kinds of voices, like bees. They just mowed them down!

"When they were shooting at us, I managed to bend over, and the bullet skimmed me. And I had on this thick quilted jacket. The bullet ripped the jacket and flicked up such a hunk of flesh you couldn't cover it with your hand. Just a little more and it would have come out here on me, the bullet. I'm lying there alive, and the baby is alive. And I'm pressing its face down, and it's bawling. I feel I'm smothering it, my heart aches. Both I and the baby are alive... I loosen my hold, it starts bawling.

"And then they shot the third group.

"Well then, he's making the rounds, raising those who might not have died yet... And they go around with pistols and finish them off. He got up to me and hears the baby is screaming, but he didn't suspect I was alive: my hair and my kerchief had been flung forward and there was blood here... He fired once at the baby, and shot through my fingers. Where I was holding its head, he shot through my fingers. And the baby fell

silent, I feel the blood spurting into my face...

"His sister, Anton's, was lying near me. She was still wheezing. He lifted her. She sat up, and he finished her off that way. And he moved away from me—farther and farther, and went on finishing people off.

"I lie there and lie there, and soon I can't breathe any more. There's blood on me here, and I'm all covered with a pile of people, my family. And I can't breathe. Then I hear the vehicles driving away, they're all driving away...

"Well, I got up. People started to come up, those others that weren't shot. They see the shot people lying there. A few started to cry. Then I started to get up. I try to get up — and can't get out: I'm under this pile of bodies, all bloody...

"They killed my mother, and they killed my sister, everyone, all my kin. What about the next morning? We spent the night like stumps in the field. I went into one house, they covered up the wound of mine a bit, dressed it and say: 'Go, Marya, otherwise the Germans will kill us, too, because of you.'

"Well, so I go from that house to another to stay the night. I spend the night, they say: 'Got to a third house now, because,' they say, 'we're afraid.'

"I spent three nights like that, and on the fourth he came, and I already... And he drove me to the hospital, in Slonim.

"They drove me in. What were we to say to those Germans at the hospital?

"But we brought this big piece of salt pork and a jug of honey, and they're glad as can be, and they took me in. As soon as I came they undressed me in a jiffy, bandaged up my hands and dressed my shoulder.

"I lie there for one week, a second week, and they keep coming to the hospital and questioning people as to who's who.

"At night they take people away and shoot them. It's fearful, fearful!... Fear seized me, and I bid him: 'Come and get me!'

"It will get to be my turn, I thought.

"He came.

"The night before I came, they'd brought a lass from Golyinka. And they came to get her at the hospital — to shoot her. But somebody told her, and she ran away from the hospital. Oh, what a row they kicked up! Against the woman on duty!... They were going to hang or shoot her because she'd let that lass run away.

"And later on, the next night, a wounded soldier was lying there, one of our soldiers. He kept coming to me and questioning me. And I'm afraid to speak. But he — well, he won't leave my side. All the time it's: 'Auntie, so how are the partisans doing there?' And I tell him, but am afraid myself, for who knows...

"And then I went home, and he comes: he'd also run away. They gave him everything — even brought boots for him to the hospital, and he left the hospital. Two weeks later he comes.

"'Well,' he says. 'I'm already with the partisans!'

"I came home from that hospital — and I can't light the stove or cook or dress myself. Anton took me to my sister, seven kilometres away, and I was there until April, I lay there ill.

"They killed eighty-six people with me then..."

There were no partisans in Vasilevichi. They had their camps on the wooded right bank of the Shchara, and they came here to the densely populated left bank only at night, as to a zone of operation or provision. It was no simple matter for the invaders to get at the partisans and engage them in battle. Here, as in other places, they used the diabolical tactic of blaming the population for



**Maria Kulak
Ivan Rubets**



everything, to drive a wedge between the civilian population and the partisans.

The invaders issued orders throughout all the villages along the Shchara not to let partisans into the house, give them food or talk to them under pain of death. But how can a mother not let in her son, a wife her husband, a sister her brother, or simply, a friend of the family? They cannot, of course, as long as they remain people. Thus the invaders created a situation where all became guilty simply because they were people.

Maria Fyodorovna Sosnovskaya describes how the nazis carried out their bloody "action" in Vasilevichi.

"...Well, it was just before the Christmas caroling that they came here to our village to kill us, on a Wednesday. When it was I don't know, I'm illiterate.

"We were all sitting in the house. My husband

had gone into town to deliver the supplies – we still owed them. And my two oldest daughters had gone to the neighbour's with tow, to spin. And I was home with those smaller lads. I had six children, I myself made seven. The younger children are playing, and a German came into the house...

"I don't know whether he was a German or not, but he was in German uniform.

"Hello! Where's the master of the house?"

"He went into town."

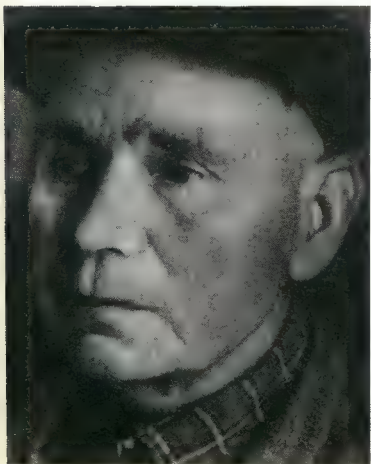
"Well, get ready to go to the meeting."

"And I says: 'What meeting?'"

"You'll see what meeting."

"And I says: 'My children are small, without shoes or clothes, they'll be cold.'"

"Because we lived poorly. The children were small: one was three, this one here was five, and the girls came back, we had all assembled, seven people in the house. Well, I picked up this one, wrapped him up and carry him. And my



oldest girl carried the younger one, that was three.

"And he says: 'Lock the house and all come out.'

"Well, we all got ready and went. And they took us toward Adam's, to the bridge. And they drove everyone out there. And we stood for maybe half the day. It got quite cold. The children started to shiver and cry. Then a taxi comes driving from town. The plenipotenshry had been in town. And Eckart. It was the plenipotenshry and Eckart who'd come in the taxi.

"We're standing on this side of the bridge, away from Adam's, and the taxi stopped on that side. They immediately got out and Eckart asks: 'Plenipotenshry, who are these people? Why did you gather them all?'

"'U-u-u! All bandits!'

"My little children are 'bandits'!

"And Eckart asks again: 'And where are those victimized policemen, who suffered from the partisans?'

"'Aa-ah, Sonechka,' the headman calls, 'come over here!'

"And he summoned forth a second woman, and a third... something like five people from policemen's families...

"But what shall they do with us? They wanted to drive us into Adam's barn to burn us. They opened that barn, and saw it was full of still unthreshed grain and hay — those nearly two hundred people wouldn't fit in. Old and young, lads and lasses — all together, whoever was home. They wouldn't fit in. They closed the barn. And the plenipotenshry says: 'Drive them to the graveyard, kill them there, in the graveyard.'

"And they herded us all like sheep into the yard. They closed it up. Germans surrounded us all round. They started to drive us all out, ten at a time.

"I — my family of seven — went in three batches. I went right away with the little lad — I'm carrying him in my arms. And afterwards two more went in the second batch, and also in the third. They didn't all go with me because everyone was fidgeting around there, crying, tearing their hair...

"And then they herded us to the graveyard.

"And I held him under me, wrapped him up and fell on top of him. (*She indicates her adult son sitting next to her.*) When they started to shoot, I feel one leg is already gone, it's wounded. And I...I feel the blood going drop-drop-drop...

"And I showed my passport, that we weren't guilty of anything. The family wasn't grown yet.

"And the bullet went through his ear and through his neck, there were three wounds. And I feel how the blood is going drop-drop-drop... And my passport was all bloody.

"Well then, they slaughtered us and afterwards — herded along the others, too. They stopped, stood there for a while, say: 'All kaput.'

"They stood there for a while, smoked and left.

"They didn't dig any pits. They just drive ten people in, lay them down on the ground... And we also lie down... It's understandable; so people won't see those bullets. They keep shooting everyone in the head, in the head...

"When they killed my children afterwards, I didn't see or hear anything, because I didn't get up.

"They slaughtered everyone, only one woman... They killed her children, she sees they've killed them, and she herself threw off her felt boots and went running to Porechye. Those Germans didn't chase after her or kill her. But all the same she pined away, pined away and died.

"And then the next day they rounded up carts and men and dug this great big pit like a silopit, and then they dragged in all those corpses and

covered them up. The men weren't from our village. We didn't have any carts. Those of our men who were around, they had gone to haul wood in the forest. Only the women were home..."

They say similar fates make people inwardly similar as well. If such be the case, Maria Fyodorovna's son, **Alexander Antonovich Sosnovsky**, is quite a good illustration of it. Their likeness is so striking that one starts to think that it was perhaps there in the graveyard, when his mother bestowed the gift of life on Alexander the second time, that he acquired this amazing resemblance. It is to be found in his straightforwardness, his manner of speaking directly, as he might walk across a freshly ploughed field with a heavy burden on his shoulders. And his steps are all directed toward her, his mother, even now, thirty years later.

"...I was five then. I remember how we were sitting in the house with my little brother. A German came in and we got scared. And we jumped up together and ran to our mother. He stood there and told Mother to get ready..."

And there in the graveyard during the shooting, when his mother shielded Sasha with her body, the eternal feeling of motherly care, of security at her breast, came over the boy like a wave. This is what he remembers:

"...And I keep telling my mother: 'Let's go home,' I say.

"And my mother takes my hand and squeezes it.

"Lie there, don't speak."

"When they'd slaughtered everyone, those Germans went into the village. They started to go from house to house, to take the hens and piglets, began to pillage. We could hear in the graveyard how they pillaged everything here.

"Well, and when they'd driven away, we got up. It was cold. I was without any coat on just like now. Mother took the coat off my older sister, you know, I put it on, left my mother and ran home. I got there, sat down in the yard and wait for Mother to come..."

"There aren't any Germans left in the village, the Germans had driven into town, the village is empty, only the doors are creaking – the wind had blown up, it was downright frightening..."

"Well, I sat there, it had already gotten dark, but my mother didn't get as far as her house, but went into her mother's. And there in that house was her neighbour, an old woman of about eighty, and Mummy asks her:

"Maybe you saw a little lad running here?"

"I saw one," she said, "some little boy running."

"Go bring him here, Granny."

"The old woman came and pulls me by the arm.

"Let's go to my house."

"But I dig my heels in, don't want to go. I say: 'Open the door for me, I'm going into our house.'

"Well, but she took me by the hand and led me there.

"We lay there like that for two weeks without any kind of bandage or anything. We were afraid to go to the doctor: the Germans had tried to kill us and if we went to them again, they'd finish us off, it was frightening after all. But then we nonetheless decided: be it as it may, but we had to go.

"We went. Pa drove us into Slonim, to the hospital there. We lay in the hospital for a month.



**Maria Sosnovskaya
and her son Alexander**



"Most of you must know what it means when 100 corpses are lying side by side, or 500, or 1,000. To have stuck it out and at the same time... to have remained decent fellows..."

From Himmler's speech

And those doctors in the hospital didn't know anything, they try to find out: 'Where were you, at the front?' They hadn't burnt our village, and in Slonim they didn't know that they'd shot us all.

"We lay in the hospital for a month and came home again..."

His mother saved Alexander Sosnovsky and he grew up to be strong and efficient, a tractor driver at the local collective farm Sovetskaya Byelarus. He is tall and sturdy, with guileless, direct blue eyes and a willful, stubborn, strong neck. But some perplexity is concealed in the folds between his thick brows: like his mother he tries to no avail to answer the question of why this happened to them, and seems to be asking it throughout his account...

The Sosnovskys' neighbour, **Teklya Petrovna Gerasimchik**, struggles with the same question.

"...Here I was born and here I was married. And now I'm going to tell you about that... In nineteen forty-two, on the sixteenth of December, it was a Wednesday. I had lit the stove and all that ... fed the children and started to sweep the house. And my husband was in the barn, winnowing either barley or oats. Well then, a German comes into the house.

"Zurick, zurick!..."

"Where, sir?"

"Over to the meeting."

"Just me?" I ask.

"No, take the children along, too. Kinder, Kinder!..."

"What's to be done... I had a little lad who was three years old. I wrapped him up like this, covered him up. He herded us out. Herded us to the bridge. He drove my husband from the barn,

too. My husband went in front, and I came after him with the children. Ganusya and Marusya Moiseyeva, two old women, were with us. They herded us here to the bridge, near Adam Gerasimchik's place. They surrounded us and put us in the yard. At first they wanted to drive us into the barn, to burn us alive, but they couldn't, no way in there: it was piled full, only the threshing-floor was empty, on one side there was hay and on the other, unthreshed rye...

"Well, we all waited for that ogre headman. He came from town in a taxi, with that chief German. He starts to ask: 'Where are your people here whose houses were burnt down?'"

"Well, his son-in-law was standing there with his family, he pointed to his son-in-law: 'These here are my folk. I don't want anyone else.'"

"I'm holding the child in my arms, I was carrying the little lad, he put his arms around my neck and didn't let me look around anywhere.

"Mummy dear, Mummy dear, don't leave me. We'll be together, the Germans will shoot us together."

"He was three years old.

"No," I says, 'sonny, I won't leave you, I won't leave you.'

"My husband took him from me, but he goes: 'No, I want Mummy, Mummy!'"

"My father-in-law was also standing there, eighty years old, in that same group. And my husband's brother and his sister with her little boy, and I with my child. They'd herded us all there, see. And that child fastened on to me like a tick. They herded us on. They herded us to the cemetery and say: 'Fall flat!' I fell down there with the child, but my husband made a dash to run away across the river. And one other little old man, Malets. They ran together. That little old man was lighter and he ran across, but my husband - I don't know, maybe he fell into the

river... A German caught up with him, he kept shooting at him, and killed him there. And he lay there for three days. I lay in the cemetery, I didn't hear if they shot anyone, my heart started to pound, I don't know, I don't remember...

"I came to only afterwards – there isn't anyone, only corpses are lying around... I raised my head – oh, I can't see anything with one eye, everything was swelled up here. A bullet hit me here and came out through my eye. I got up and fell back down, I see the child is lying there dead. I says to him: 'Kostik, Kostik,' but he doesn't answer, he was already dead. Here is my dead father-in-law, there my sister-in-law is lying. My sister-in-law killed with her child. I got up and fell back down..."

"Evening was already falling. And my father-in-law's house stood on a farm near the cemetery. I got up after all, held on to a bush a little. Everything on me was stiff, soaked with blood. I threw off the blanket the child was wrapped up in and crawled off. I crawled up to that house, crawled into the house – nobody's there. I lay down on the bed there, lay there and lay there, I – everything's buzzing... And then someone walks into the house... And I think it's someone coming in to kill me. But it's just Katerina Khatunchik coming up to my bed. And they'd killed three of her children. But she'd just happened to go feed the cow, that's how she was left. But Lyuba, her daughter-in-law, was killed together with her little children. Now she says to me: 'Are you alive?'"

"'I'm alive,' I answer.

"'Let's go,' she says, 'I'll take you to your house.'

"She lifted me up, took me by the arm, covered me with sackcloth and took me to my house. I fell down there near my house and lay there – there's nobody nowhere. Afterwards she got me up all the

same and led me off to Popadichkova's house. And the headman's son-in-law lived there. She opens the door and takes me in there. And they shout: 'Just where are you taking her?'"

"I understand everything, I just can't see anything with this eye, it's all swollen. And his old mother says: 'This way they'll kill us, too, because of her.'

"She's dead now. If she were alive, I would say it to her face. They got ready and left the house, and I was left alone. I lie there. It's dark already, there's no one anywhere, it's quiet... And then someone opens the door to the house and Malanya comes in and says to me: 'Are you alive?'"

"'I'm alive,' I answer.

"'Come on, I'll carry you to my house..."

"Malanya Gerasimchik took me in some sackcloth and carried me to her house. She tended to me, you know, the whole night. And her husband Mikolai. He died already.

"But she's still alive.

"And the next morning that headman drove up. And that headman was Malanya's brother-in-law.

"'What, she's alive,' he says, 'she's still left around..."

"And they say to him: 'Well, so she's alive. And may she live.'

"And I still had two daughters and a son. My son was seven, and he was at my sister's. That's how he was left. One daughter, Tanya, whom I live with now ran away. She hid under the stove with her aunt. They came into the house to look for them four times, but they'd covered themselves with potatoes under the stove..."

"And the next morning my sister came, picked me up and drove me to the hospital. And when I got out of the hospital I had to work, there weren't any collective farms yet then. So I worked a little with the kids. I went around with

my head wrapped up. It still aches now, twenty-eight years have passed and it still keeps on aching...

"And I worked, ... and rejoiced that at least Soviet power had come and I could at least go to bed and sleep in peace..."

Teklya Gerasimchik is a solicitous, thoughtful woman, of the type who under present conditions make good teachers and educators. She is concerned about going to the roots of things, the causes... She was a witness for the prosecution at the trial of the nazi villains and their assistants. The headman tried to justify himself then, saying: "It's not I who killed you, but the action..."

Teklya Petrovna firmly said: "It wasn't the action that killed, but you!"

Young girls figure in the poetry of all peoples as creatures of tender purity. In Byelorussian songs they are symbolized by white birches, flowering guelder roses, roses in the morning dew.

But Maria Skok from Pavlovichi and Yevgenia Bardun from Niz were two young girls whose lives were scorched by the fire of death. At that time Maria was already engaged, but Yevgenia was still a child, like Alexander Sosnovsky.

Maria Mikhailovna Skok began her account with reflections. Her tale contains notes of pride and shows a keen understanding of the inviolability of the ties which then existed between the partisans and the people. She also fully understands that the tragedy of her village cannot be explained by the invaders' struggle against the partisans. Now a person with experience, she realizes that the crux of the matter lay in the fundamental abnormality, inhumanity of nazism.

"...We helped the partisans. And we knew that it would lead to no good. But we struggled..."

"Well then... We were assembled to change our passports. They say: 'Go get your passport changed.' Over there where the cross stood.

"They had come a few times before that. They had made us kneel down and threatened us. They had fired machine-guns over our heads, shot and burned people and said: 'Put that in your pipe and smoke it, it won't be any good for you to keep on doing this.' Finally they came and say: 'Go have your passports checked.' We went with our passports. The younger men they led off to the side.

"And the women and children..."

"There was a big hut, they herded us together in there, put sentries in the covered porch and outside the windows, with grenades. And they started to drive out seven or eight people at a time. And shoot them there.

"It was like this: one of them holds you by the arm, takes you up to the pit and shoots you in the back of the head... There were four of them there who did the shooting, their sleeves are rolled up to here and they're holding revolvers in their hands. The people who had better clothes on, well, they took them off them and threw them in a heap. When they were still alive, before shooting them. They'd take you up to the pit and — bang in the back of your head. There were a hundred-and-two people with me in that grave. Only I was left out of a hundred-and-two people. Immediately they ... shot me, I fell down and lost consciousness, but afterwards I regained consciousness... And they were clapping their hands like this!..."

"Night was already falling. If it had been near the bottom, how could I have ever got out, but I was lying on top.

"They shot everyone and clapped their hands.

"‘There,’ they say, ‘here’s kaput to you!’
 “I remember that. I had already come to. Apparently they also wanted to throw grenades, but then they mumbled something and left.

“Oh, what squealing and groaning there was!... Many live people suffocated in there. But there was nobody to dig them out. And they pleaded: ‘save us’, ‘save us, please,’ but there wasn’t anybody.

“And they had their fun with people even before the shooting: they stabbed them with pitchforks and trampled them underfoot and beat them – oh!... There were small children, and they trampled them alive with their feet... And some knew the Germans liked eggs, some child would bring one of them eggs and beg him not to kill him. And he’d give such a kick that he would tumble head over heels – and the German would start trampling him.

“As for me, my four brothers were killed and my mother. They had crawled under the stove and hidden there. Everyone is afraid to see death in the face. And they stuck them so with pitchforks there was nowhere you could have pricked them with a needle. Under the stove. It was when they were getting them out of there, and those kids didn’t want to crawl out.

“I myself was stabbed with pitchforks. And then they drove us to be shot. And so I lay there until two in the morning. In that grave. I remember – I shoved one woman to the side, shoved another, and myself... I was wounded, my front was already soaked with blood, right down to my waist, and I myself had grown weak – either from fear or because it had been a whole day...

“How often we ran away, how often we hid!... It was seldom when we were at home. And to our misfortune, we had stayed home.

“Well... And now I’m afraid to get up. I crawl out of that grave, crawl some, crawl some, crawl some all around, and crawl back in again, lie down on top of those dead people. Is it stuffy! So many people! The air is so oppressive, that blood is boiling like in a cauldron. I think: where can those Germans be? I’m afraid to get up. I climb in and lie down on top of those dead people again.

“And then – I’ll go now, be what may! I went, went along through those bushes toward the Shchara. I think: ‘I’ll go drown myself, just so long as they don’t torture me. It’s all the same.’

“One little lad, he was six maybe, got up, and he knew, remembered where they’d driven his pa – and he went to that house. And they ran into him and took him to a potato pit... He was all bloody and wounded, and they took him to a potato pit and finished him off. And a little girl was sitting there – they’d killed her mother and she – four years old she was – sat there and kept begging: ‘Mummy, you’ve slept enough now, get up, let’s go home!’

“And they shot her, too.

“I think: ‘I’ll go drown myself, just so long as I don’t see them and their death.’

“I went. It seems to me I’ve been walking and walking... I walked and walked, I’d gotten so weak that I went into Kabaki: that village over there, beyond the river. I entered it and it seemed to me that all, all around was the Shchara. Wherever I went, whichever way – all around was the Shchara. I had got dizzy in the head already.

“And I think: ‘I’ll go drown myself.’ And I crawled and crawled and crossed to the other side of the Shchara, and I remember I haven’t drowned myself. Where did I end up and how did I get there? I seem to have got onto my hands and knees and crawled... I got tangled up in some

barbed wire. I tried and tried to disentangle myself and barely got out of that barbed wire...

"I entered that village of Kabaki, and I'd grown weak already, I can't go any further. And wherever there's a bush or a post I think it's a German standing there.

"And one cottage was standing there on the common. 'I'll go in,' I think, 'I'll open the door a crack and ask whether there're any Germans...' I went in the gate and see laundry hanging there. I think: they killed them here, too. I opened the door a crack and ask: 'Are there any Germans here?'

"And the owner says: 'No, there aren't.'

"And when they saw that I was all bloody and messy, they began to exclaim. I went into the house. And one guy went to look around the village to see if there was maybe iodine or bandages somewhere.

"That guy went, and brought back bandages and iodine. And I had breathed so much of that bad air that I vomited and vomited... He gave me a glass of vodka. I drank it down — nothing helped. He gave me a cigarette — nothing. And I'm all wet as wet can be — soaked to the skin, and all covered with blood. And the children are afraid of me.

"They gave me some sort of mattress, a child's mattress, and I lay down near the doorstep. How can I lie there — I'm all wet, all bloody. I got up at three in the morning and left.

"I left. A round-up was going on, and I had to cross the highroad. I got almost as far as Melniki, to the farmsteads. I went up to one house. I had grown so weak already, and I sat down by the wall. The woman there got up early, and I went up to her: 'Do you have any Germans here, Auntie?'

"She says: 'No. Go on, go into the house.'

"I went in, and they ask: 'What happened, did

they shoot people in your village maybe?'

"But I'm afraid to speak... I sat in the house for a while and left.

"I went into the woods. I was so wet, and it was cold, and I'd grown so weak — I dozed off under a little spruce tree. I dozed off and — the Germans are coming! There was a small copse there. And they were taking young people to Germany then. And the Germans are talking. And three guys, just like me, were running there, hiding. And they also heard the Germans talking, they're also running. And I hear a crackling sound. I think: 'Germans!' They're coming from that direction, and I go running down that little hill to that same guy, into his barn. I came running into the yard, and that guy says: 'Where shall I stick you? It will be all the same — they'll shoot both you and me. I'll lock you up in the barn,' he says, 'and if they find you they'll kill you, if they set it afire you'll burn up, but maybe you'll be lucky and be left alive.'

"And he has peas stored in there on a level with the beam and just this far away from the wall, and I crawled behind that pile of peas. And now I hear the Germans walking around the yard and cackling like ganders around that barn. And then the doors open. That guy had some moonshine, a whole big bottle already distilled, standing on the threshing-floor. They were taking his brother to Germany: he came and took that moonshine, went and treated them, gave them some to take with them — ransomed his brother. And they drove away without doing any harm. That's how I was left.

"I was left. I sat there until evening and went away into the woods. I sat hungry in the woods for a whole week under a bush. I got sick with that... dysentery. I crawled on all fours for two weeks.

"They shot my mother and one brother, who

was in school, with a rifle, and three of my relatives here in the street. They killed fifty-five people in the street, even threw grenades at them, too.

"We were never home until the Germans withdrew...

"Now I have three children. My son works on the collective farm as a tractor-driver, he studied in Slonim for two years. And my daughter is married and lives in Slonim..."

Plump and smiling Maria Skok, in contrast to some of the other women we interviewed, took a long time to broach the subject, and she kept stopping to collect her spirits or wipe away a tear. Her good-natured face only lit up when we closed up the tape-recorder and asked her about her children, complimenting her on her truly very pleasant daughter-in-law. We even photographed the two of them together, related women with such different fates.

In the village of Niz we were introduced to **Yevgenia Adamovna Bardun** in absentia by **Levon Sidorovich Alizar**, whom we called on earlier than her about the same business.

At first the old man told us about a local nazi underling.

"A-a," the old man said, scornfully drawing out the word, "that guy that sold our village? A polizei!... He was that way all his life. Back under land-owners' Poland he also sort of busied himself with politics — both this way and that... Once he planted a red flag on one lad ... stuck it in under the eaves over the door in his house so it would be seen, that flag. And that lad because of him spent four years in jail under Poland. He was a provocateur..."

Slow, good-natured Alizar just cannot find the words to explain all this.

The nazis separated off the younger men from

the women, old men and children, ordered them to collect food and spades and showed them where they were to dig a pit.

The men refused. Then they were ordered to harness up the horses, and "those young people", men from sixteen to forty, were taken in carts to Slonim to be sent to Germany. The old men and all the women and children were herded into one house and led out in small groups behind the barn, where they were shot in the back of the head with pistols — each German taking care of the person he had escorted...

From the very beginning old Alizar kept looking at the tape-recorder in amazement as he spoke, and when he started to tell us about agent-provocateur and polizei Belyavsky, his bewilderment increased. He seemed to be saying: really, good people, it's impossible for a normal person to make sense out of the actions of a degenerate unless he is to go mad himself; and in general it's hard to convey to normal people today what happened at the hands of the enemy on that mad day when I myself, Levon Sidorovich, hardly survived my gun wounds.

The old man is pestered by his grandchildren, but on the other hand perhaps it's they who come to his rescue by distracting him from his awful memories. He had no less than three of them to look after when we called on him at the height of the hay-making season. The three little anarchists had instituted their own order in his house. To protect them against the rascals, the old man had evidently cleared away all decorations, and in general all objects within their reach that they might have smashed, broken or thrown down. The old man's clean living room looked somehow empty and unhomey: two pine benches stood along the walls, like two rays, from the corner where, high up under the ceiling, hung a small icon of the Virgin holding just such a lively tyke as

the old man's youngest grandson. The benches had been scored by pocket knives, gouged with an axe, studded with nails and their legs were wobbly; a little ways off stood a table, less marked by the urchins' creativity. But old Alizar did not even seem to notice the disorder here. When we got down to taking pictures, he asked with a childlike smile: "Can you photograph me with my grandsons?"

Accompanying us out into the street, he pointed toward the north, toward the other end of the village, and said: "There, to the left, next to the store, is a fine new house. That's Yevgenia Bardun's place."

"Her husband must be a carpenter?"

"She don't have a husband. Only children. The collective farm helped her make the house."

We didn't find Yevgenia Adamovna home; she was haying beyond the Shchara. The day after the next, a Sunday, we also had to wait until lunchtime for her to come back from the field.

Seeing us in the yard, she came up with a rake on her shoulder. Short and well-built, she would even have been pretty in her own way had it not been for her shoulders, overly broad from doing a man's work.

When she learned why we had come, Yevgenia sat down on the grass and burst into tears... Then she began:

"...The Germans came into the house. They came to get pa. Our pa was ill and he managed to get leave to stay home: 'Let me stay, my stomach's sick.' And they let him go. And the German policeman said then — he lived at that end of the village — don't go anywhere, they'll check your passports and that's all. All of us girls were still small then, nobody was with the partisans,

only pa had helped the partisans pull a tank out of the river. Well, pa was afraid because he, you know, had pulled out that tank 'for the Soviets', was afraid that the Germans suspected him and might kill him.

"Then the policeman and a German come into the house and drive us out. And they herded us together into one house, there were many of us, they herded together half the village.

"And they started to lead people out.

"They led out three men, and then my pa, too, in the second group of three. A German just came and shows 'drei, drei' with his fingers. People went out by themselves, for where can you go, he's showing a grenade — come out...

"Well, and my pa went out with the second group. Mother saw... that they'd already led out pa, and her children were small... she collected her family and led us little ones out after father.

"She led us after him... I had two older sisters, and mother was carrying the baby. The little boy. He was a year old. And my sister was carrying the other boy, two he was.

"They led us up to the shed. Then I somehow ran ahead of my sister. The German shot her in the back of the head and she knocked me off my feet, and that's how I was left. She fell on me like this — from my neck to my waist, and a pile of other people fell on my legs. People kept walking up to me, they shot them and they toppled down on me. But my head was above, not underneath people, and that's how I survived. And after they had killed everyone here, they started to kill people at the other end of the village. And I'm just lying there.

"Three boys were left wounded, wounded lads my age, among the bodies. I raised my head, they're crying, wounded, blood is running from them. And I started to talk to them, raised my



head a tiny bit. But I didn't get up, I couldn't get up: big bodies were lying on me. I spoke to them, and then a German comes running. He ran up to them and finished them right off with a rifle.

"And he happened to step on my pa's leg, who was lying there wounded. And he was still standing there then. He evidently noticed me, too, that I was alive... And how was it I didn't say anything at that moment?"

"I lay there and lay there — it had already gotten dark. He didn't finish me off. But otherwise, if someone was alive, he finished them all off. Small children suffocated under the bodies. There was one little girl, and her father didn't find any wound on her anywhere afterwards.

"Then the cars drone and the Germans drive off... I must have fainted by then... The Germans had already started to drive away, pigs are squealing, hens are squawking, they're catching them. And I hear someone's come up to the bodies and is speaking... This man from the village comes up and says:

"'Whoever's alive, get up, the Germans have gone!'

"My pa recognized his voice, got up and says: 'Well, I'm alive.'

"And one more man, Levon Alizar. And pa says to him: 'Go home and get some bread, and I'll have a look at my family...'

"And he started to look. He says: 'All my children are here, just one little girl is missing, six years old, but she couldn't have run away, she's still a child.' He started to look around, and I called out. And my legs had been crushed by the people, all the bones... They shoot people, and the bullet doesn't hit the bone, just tears up the flesh. You could see the bones in my legs, I just couldn't walk at all.

"Well, and my pa went into a stupor over that heap.

"And then that Alizar comes running up. They shook pa, lifted me out of that heap and carried me into the woods. I was covered with blood, when they'd put me down on the snow my legs kept swaying, they'd been squashed, a big heap of people had lain on me.

"They carried me into the woods. There were these farmsteads there, people had run away into the woods. They were sitting there making a fire.

"They saw we were all covered with blood, that they're carrying me covered with blood, some child... They all ran off.

"And my pa started to call to them, that we were not enemies. So I was dried off. And pa sent me off to Talkovshchina, near Slonim, I had an aunt there. Well then, they hid me there for a week. Those wounds all festered. It was terrible, there wasn't anything to treat them with...

"My pa lived for a while, but then after the war he died of those wounds, he caught gangrene in his leg.

"But I was left. I was six years old then, in my seventh year, when they killed us..."

The village of Velikaya Volya lies in the lower reaches of the Shchara, which here flows from south to north. It is over a hundred kilometres from Velikaya Volya to Okuninovo, a distance which indicates the scope of the crime that, according to Pyotr Savchits from Garodki, the nazis called "action against partisans". In the nazi reports this operation was called "Hamburg".

Five adults and four children survived in Velikaya Volya. One of the adults was **Ivan Iosifovich Pavočka**.

This sensible and kindly man witnessed the invaders' crimes on more than one occasion. His

testimony is included in the indictment of the "State Commission of Kozlovshchina District, Grodno Region, for Establishing and Investigating the Crimes of the Invaders in 1941-1944" and was published in a separate volume. The documents record the general course of events and the circumstances of the crimes. Ivan Iosifovich then testified that on January 16, 1942, by order of the German officer Suck, all the peasants' cattle was herded from the village of Velikaya Volya to the small town of Kozlovshchina. Soon a second nazi punitive detachment burst into the village, herded all the inhabitants together in one place and split them into two groups, one of which, consisting of 156 people, among whom were the witness, his wife and two children, the nazis drove into a quarry which before the war had provided sand for building a bridge over the Shchara. The Germans ordered the people to lie down and shot them with a machine-gun.

"The first round," testified Ivan Pavochka, "was aimed at the heads of those lying there and my son Mikhail was mortally wounded, while a bullet tore off the middle finger on my left hand and shattered the ring-finger and little finger. My son managed to say: 'Papa, it hurts' — and died."¹⁰

Survivors from the second group of a hundred and thirty people said they had been taken away in lots of twelve, driven into the forest and shot there.

After telling the horrible story once again on our request, Ivan Iosifovich even agreed to take us to the site of the shooting and showed us how he had lain there under machine-gun fire on that winter day.

Below we give an exact transcription of his present account.

Like many other people who escaped the fire, Ivan Pavochka began his story with discussion of

the nazi version of a "struggle against the partisans".

"...The Germans gathered a large force against the woods. They didn't do anything to the partisans. And with all that hate of theirs they fell on the local population.

"We ran away into the woods. It was winter. With the children. Well, the woods were no place to be: what with the frost and cold. We went to the village of Kopti. The Germans drove in and say: 'Go home.' Well, we, naturally, were forced to go, because we'd left everything there: both the horses and the cows.

"We came home, we're sitting there and see them coming.

"My neighbour says: 'Good day, mister.'

"And they: 'Good day, mister bandit.'

"They looted all our things, took all our cattle. And took fifteen people or so away with them.

"We're sitting there. There isn't anybody. And we didn't have time to look around before the Germans descended on us again. A German comes into every house and instructs us to each take food for three days. 'We're taking you away from here.' Some people managed to take something along and some didn't.

"Snow was lying on the ground, and they took one old man along barefoot, without a shirt and without a hat.

"They made us all get onto our knees then. They beat us with their butts and kicked us with their feet... And suddenly we heard the rumbling of heavy vehicles. Nine trucks came, and the trucks were full of Germans inside. Twenty each maybe, and maybe even more. Young Germans, with helmets pulled down over their heads.



**Maria Skok with
her daughter-in-law**



Yevgenia Bardun



"An officer got out of one truck, gave a command, and they led us off under a strong escort. The trucks drove along on the right side, and the Germans walked on the left.

"Before we reached that place they stopped us, and three Germans went ahead with a machine-gun. They set up the machine-gun on a small knoll, two of them stayed there, and the third came back and waved his arm.

"They took us into the hollow in front of that machine-gun and told us to lie down. We lay down with whoever was there. Well, I lay down with my seven-year-old boy, held him in my arm, pressing him against my chest, and my wife, with our three-year-old daughter. When we lay down, the hat toppled off my head, and I didn't put it on again.

"The Germans walked off from us... Aha! The Germans walked off to the side and lay low all around. And that German whose machine-gun was standing on the knoll took that machine-gun and came up within about twenty metres from us. There was crater there where a German bomb had fallen. He climbed into that crater, knelt down and set the machine-gun on the edge of the crater. Then the Germans walked off from us and he fired the first burst at our heads.

"I was lying on my left side and I was shot like this in the fingers, and the little lad in the head. And he only managed to say: 'O, Daddy, it hurts!'

"And I say: 'Quiet, Misha, it won't hurt.'

"He didn't say anything more.

"They fired five bursts. I was hit in the right leg, my sole was singed and my foot slit open. It hurt a lot. I move it and it moves, but the pain is unbearable. It was just as though someone were rubbing nettles over my fingers.

"Afterwards they started to finish off those who were groaning. My whole face was covered with

blood. A German came up, kicked me in the head and my head swung like this, but I didn't open my eyes.

"They themselves started to strew us with earth. The earth was frozen, these clods and sand. They tore the skin on my face...

"And behind my back lay – he was about sixteen maybe – this young lad. He wasn't wounded anywhere. He rose to his feet and begs: 'Dear sirs, don't kill me! You killed my mother and sisters, let me off alive.'

"They said something in German, something among themselves, a pistol shot rang out, and he fell down dead on top of me.

"They sprinkled on some sand, and I started to suffocate. I think: I'll crawl out, let them finish me off, it's terrible to suffocate. I was all wet, as though I'd been in a river. I raised myself a bit once, then a second time, and I lost consciousness. Then I strained myself somehow – well, I was young and strong then – raised myself up a bit, those clumps slid apart, and it grew easier for me to breathe.

"And I lie and listen. I can't hear them shovelling on any more... I don't know how long I lay there. Then I moved some more, stuck out my face and hear – shots can be heard at the other end now. I lay there until it got dark. Without getting up I say: 'Get up, whoever's alive. The Germans are gone, they've left.'

"No one answered. There were a hundred and fifty of us here at this end of the village, and only I was left... I tore up my shirt, wrapped up my wound and went into the woods...

"I lay in the woods for three days and nights. 'Well,' I think, 'I'll go to the village of Kopti, if they kill me, someone will at least cover me with earth, otherwise if I die in the woods animals will just drag off my bones.' I reached the village of Kopti early in the morning and didn't recognize

it — it had changed its appearance to me, become completely different. I know that this here is Kopti, the dogs are barking from Malaya Volya, but I don't recognize Kopti. I stood there for a while and went away again.

"Later on I found our people, who had run away from Kozlovshchina, we met up. My neighbour and I went to Kopti, and I stayed there this time.

"I put up at Victor Kosach's and lay there for six days. Then Alexei Kopot, who once served in the Polish army as a medical orderly, dressed my wounds..."

More than twenty-five years had passed between Ivan Pavochka's first, officially recorded account and the one we taped, but time had not erased the traces of fire and bullets in the teller's memory. In his 1971 account he reasons that the nazis had been unable to smash the partisans, and "with all that hate of theirs" had set about venging themselves on the civilian population. At the time he could not, of course, have known that on November 11, 1942, the supreme command of the nazi army had issued a special, secret document entitled "Instructions on the Treatment of the Bandits and Their Accomplices", Point 83 of which recommended: "Show extreme cruelty in the treatment of the bandits and their volunteer accomplices... The very cruelty of the measures and the fear of imminent punishment should restrain the population from helping and assisting the bands."¹¹ Following the circulation of these instructions, Keitel, the head of the Wehrmacht's General Staff, issued an order in Point One of which he wrote that there was no need to adhere to international agreements and accepted rules of warfare. "This struggle no longer has anything in common with soldierly chivalry or the provisions

of the Geneva Convention... Our troops without any restrictions may and must use any means in this struggle, against women and children included, just so long as they lead to success."¹² Point Two: "Not one German participating in the struggle against the partisan bands should be subjected to disciplinary sanctions or court-martialled..."¹³

Ivan Pavochka's intuition was right — the members of the execution squads were forgiven for everything in advance. They proved to be unable to fight the partisans and under the guise of partisans killed women, children and old men.

Preserved in the archives is "Report No. 28 of the security police and SD on the results of the 'Hamburg' and 'Altona' punitive expeditions of January 22, 1943 in the area of Baranovich and Brest regions". Here the expedition members' immediate superiors boast of their "exploits" to their supreme commanders and give out the killed civilians to be partisans. The following are two excerpts from the "Report".

"...Operation 'Hamburg' in the area of the town of Slonim.

"This operation was one of the most successful that have been carried out in Byelorussia to date. The data furnished by the reconnaissance team of the security police and SD were so precise that it was possible to locate every camp. As many as 1,676 partisans were killed in numerous battles. 1,510 more people were shot on suspicion of ties with partisans. A lot of spoils were taken, including 4 armoured cars and 8 anti-tank weapons, an enormous amount of cattle and grain. In addition, 2,658 Jews and 30 Gypsies were exterminated in the settlements located within the area of the operation. The Germans' losses amounted to 7 killed and 18 wounded.

"Operation 'Altona' in the area of Kossovo-Byten.

“This operation was carried out with the purpose of routing a large partisan detachment which forced its way through to the south after operation ‘Hamburg’... 97 partisans were killed. A further 785 persons were shot in this area on suspicion of partisan membership, as well as 126 Jews and 24

Gypsies. Important spoils were seized: cattle and produce. An insignificant amount of weapons and ammunition was seized.”¹⁴

In actual fact the nazis did not run into a single partisan detachment in the Slonim area. They simply fell upon peaceful villages.

Beast Hunts Man

"...You walk and walk and walk and walk and hear a crackling over here, so you go in the other direction. They hunted people in the woods, in the swamp... You walk through the mud, up to your waist in it, you flounder and wallow, and go-o!... The dear Lord forbid! We'd say: 'We'll eat once a day, if only we can get out of the swamp...' (**Ganna Grigoryevna Tarasevich** from the village of Ikany, Borisov District, Minsk Region.)

They would drive, force people out of their villages or towns into the woods. Then they'd go hunting, hunting women and children, like beasts conducting a battue for people.

Ganna Pavlovna Burak from the village of Lisna, Verkhnedvinsk District, Vitebsk Region, gave us the following account:

"...We sat there in the woods for about a week. My husband says: 'Let's go closer to home. One of the neighbours,' he says, 'moved there, and they go into the village and bring back potatoes, bring back grain and grind it, make gruel and bake flat cakes. We'll go there, too,' he says.

"Well, what can I do, I can't stand up against him all by myself, what will I do by myself with two children? Well then, he drove there, and our daughter went with him.

"I,' he says, 'am going home, maybe I'll bring back some potatoes!'

"Well, so they went and I was left with my children. He came back and says to me: 'Let the kids go with me now, we'll be picking up the last load...'

"Well, so they went, and I was left. I wait and wait and wait — and they're still not back. And the sun set — and they're still not back, and it got

dark — they're still not back. I'm already in a panic, crying. Why, I mean, they've been gone for a long time, why aren't they back yet? I went to my neighbour and told him what happened. He says: 'It's clear they're gone, the Germans caught them, they wouldn't have stayed there.'

"Well then, in the morning, when it's hardly light yet, my oldest lad comes running to me. And he says: 'Mummy, the Germans caught us. They caught Grandpa,' he says, 'and Vitya, and they caught Kuzma there with the kids,' he says, 'and an old woman... And I came back because they found two cows and ordered me to lead one of them and another girl to lead the other. Well,' he says, 'I think to myself: "I'll lead that cow to the swamp and then,"' he says, '"I'll tie it to the back of the sledge and myself make for the woods." We're moving slowly, I tied it to the sledge, and the German doesn't look back. I tied on that cow and beat it into the bushes and ran on. And that girl ran after me. I ran,' he says, 'beneath a tree and plumped down and lay there...'

"My father was deaf, and the younger lad says to him: 'Grandpa, our Shura's gone now.

"And he's crying. And the German says: 'Don't cry,' he says, 'little boy, tomorrow Shura will be together with you again, and Mummy will be there, you'll all be together...'

"Well, then,' he says, 'he let fire a burst from his tommy-gun, that German, exactly in the direction where we were lying, at that tree. If,' he says, 'he'd aimed one quarter lower, he would have killed me,' he says. 'Two bullets hit that pine.'

"Well, then they finished shooting and went on, and he, the little lad, knew that two men had been digging themselves a dug-out there on the island, well, so he ran there: 'maybe I'll find them there,' he says. He runs there and they, he says, have unharnessed the horses and are calmly smok-

ing. 'And I just yelled at them,' he says: "'Hey, sirs, let's get out of here fast! The Germans,'" he says, "'have already caught and taken away Grandpa and Kuzma and the kids!...'"

"'And they harnessed up the horses real quick, and one of the men,' he says, 'put me on the sleigh up by him, jammed me in at his feet, and they drove those horses as fast as they could ever run.' They dashed out onto the lake. They were already in the middle of the lake when the Germans came out onto the lake with those people and started to shoot at them with a machine-gun. But they couldn't reach them, just splattered them with these splinters, with ice. Then they came out to the bank, set up a tommy-gun ... no, a machine-gun, and started to shoot at them. But they couldn't reach them, they were already far away. Well, then they drove to us, and that's how he came to me and told what happened there.

"Then I says to my neighbours: 'Well, since they already caught them today, they'll catch us tomorrow. They'll come here.'

"Well, and that's what happened. At dawn they came to us, those Germans.

"Many of us had gathered there. Well, we just couldn't decide the question nohow.

"One person says: 'Let's drive beyond the lake, beyond Lisnyanskoe.'

"And another says: 'No!...'"

QUESTION: "Was it you who said that?"

"The neighbours. There were many people there, maybe a couple of hundreds. Well, and then they fussed around there for such a long time that the sun already started to rise, you can't go out onto the lake any more: you'd be seen, the Germans would just kill you. And then we hear some sort of rustling behind the hill. There was a lot of hoarfrost and the rustling was loud. But there were lots of people and you just couldn't make head or tail out of it.

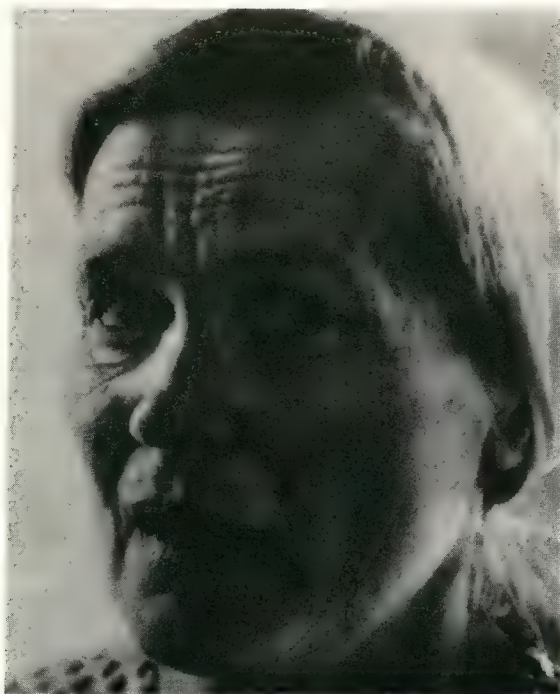
"They're shouting: 'Quiet, quiet! So we can at least find out what kind of noise it is!'

"Right then a few little boys ran up the hill, and I ran along with them up the hill, and my little lad, that older one, ran with me. Well, about ten of us went running. We had just reached the top of the hill – and there, beneath us, was this thick, thick pine forest. And there're Germans there. Coming up the hill. We shouted then and waved our arms at those others that the Germans were already there, the Germans... They'd been standing there at the bottom of the hill, and they ran down along the swamp. And we went running over the hill. And we were running over the hill, and the Germans – three of them or so – were running after us. They were shouting in Russian, swearing at us, and shooting, but we kept running. I had a sheepskin coat on, I'd unbuttoned it, and those flaps were fluttering, and a bullet hit one of the flaps, an explosive bullet. A shred got torn off. I took off my coat then and threw it down. I wouldn't be able to run away anywhere with it anyway. And those who had any knapsacks on their backs with dried bread in them – they dumped everything. We ran up to the lake and say: 'Should we run through the swamp, or go across the lake?'

"And I says: 'No, we'd better run straight across the lake. While we meddle our way through they'll just overtake us here.'"

QUESTION: "What was the name of that lake?"

"Karasino. So then. So we ran across that lake. I ran first, and everyone ran after me. We came out onto a thawed patch. This happened just before Easter, there were patches of thawed ground. We stand there. We're wiping ourselves off, because sweat is pouring from all of us. And suddenly there are Germans riding ahead of us on a couple of horses. Where are we to go? If we go



Ganna Burak



forward – the forest is very scarce here, they'll kill us here. If we go back – they're shooting there and people are screaming, they're burning, there's a pillar of smoke. It's just unbelievably terrifying! Where are we to go? And suddenly we see a shaggy spruce lying this far away from us, fallen down in the swamp. I says to one boy: 'Let's lie down under the crown, you on one side and I on the other.'

"As for those little boys who were there... There was a little fir tree lying there like this, and they lifted it up and crawled in underneath, and crouched there. And that boy and I hid under the crown: he lay down on one side and I on the other. I only had one sweater left on me, and it was red, and there was a warm shawl on my head. I took the shawl off my head and covered my shoulders with it like this, so it couldn't be seen it was red. And my arms were bare, and my head



was bare, and my knees were bare. My stockings had slipped down, there was no time to pull them up. And I lay down in the snow like that, I lay in that snow... And we lay there the whole day. And they, when they rode up to us, those Germans, they stopped. Well, we say, this will be the end of us now... They got off their sleighs and started to look for footprints. It's good we didn't run off that patch of thawed ground anywhere. They looked and looked — there weren't any footprints going backwards anywhere; they barked out something in their language, took out cigarettes, lit up, we could smell those cigarettes of theirs, and sat down in the field: they drove off maybe three hundred metres or so from us and prepared an ambush. They unharnessed their horses, lit a fire and fired a shot. And we're lying there without budging from the spot, there was nowhere we could go. And we could see them. And so we were

lying there all day long. When they weren't shooting, shivers would start to run up and down our backs, but as soon as they'd shoot, you'd get real hot right away, as though somebody'd poured boiling water on you. Well, and we lay there like that for a full day, while the sun lasted. The sun set. Then they harnessed up their horses, fired a shot and got moving. And we lay there for about half an hour more then, got up, and our arms were like rakes, and our legs were already — there simply wasn't any movement in them at all!... Lying in the snow with bare feet and legs...

"Well, and then we go collect those kids. We started to collect those kids, started to call to them. Those who were nearby came running, but mine had run so far away — back the way we'd come, across the lake, he'd joined some other people and he was over there then. I started to yell my head off. People are yelling at me: 'Don't yell,

otherwise the Germans will come and kill everyone!"

"‘Let them come, life isn’t interesting to me any more anyway, I’ve been left all alone,’ I say. ‘Let them come,’ I say.

"Well, and they didn’t hear, didn’t come to us.

"And we go back then, to look at the spot where they... Where we left our horses and sledges. We follow our footprints, walk right in our own footprints.

"Yes. Then we climbed up the hill and hear some kind of rustling in the swamp. The brushwood was crackling. We again scattered through the woods, every which way. We listen. We hear them talking Russian.

"‘That’s some of our folks,’ we say.

"Then we went back there to the swamp in a clump. And there’re three men there from Velikoe Selo... One from our village, and two from Velikoe Selo, which is near Osveya, this guy Semyon and his son. Well, then we went up to them and started to talk, about who’d come from where, and as for food – we don’t even mention it. We hadn’t had anything in our mouths for two days. And nobody had anything. That man says, Belsky: ‘I have a couple of handfuls of peas.’

"And he divided up those peas among us all, and we ate those peas and went over to where we’d left all our things. We get there – the horses are killed, the sleighs are broken, the pillows are all ripped apart – the forest is simply white, all white! Those who had fat in barrels – everything was opened up and sprinkled with that poison, and these bits of paper were lying there with flies drawn on the packets, so you could see they were already sprinkled with it... And the people were all killed, dragged together into heaps and splashed with petrol, and they’re burning like real wood, they even sizzle as they burn! Well, so, we stayed there then..."

QUESTION: "Were those people from your village?"

"They were from everywhere, come together from the whole area they were. Well. And they were all killed there. Well, so, then we go – go closer to home. We go one behind the other – following each other, about ten people, and no one says a word to anyone. If we had to stop, then I catch hold of you, and you grab someone else, a third – and we all stop that way. We listen – there’s nothing to be heard anywhere. Then one shoves the other in turn, and we get going again. We were so frightened we couldn’t speak, because so many people were lying there and all burning..."

And *this* went on not for days, not for months, but for years.

Ganna Burak continues her bitter tale:

"...Well then, we ran into the woods. A big battle began. There wasn’t anywhere for us to go. The Germans were retreating. We then..."

QUESTION: "This was when the front was drawing near?"

"The Germans were retreating, ours were advancing on them. That was already in forty-four. Well then, there was nowhere for us to go, and we then ran into a lake. This deep, silty lake. We went into that lake and held on to these tussocks and ferns and lay in that... Well, we were right up to our necks in water. And the frogs, how they pestered us! These big, scary ones – you can’t beat them off. You take one in your hand, throw it as far off as you can. It’s gone for about five minutes, then it crawls back up to you, going ‘croak-croak’. We hurl it away again. We lay like that till evening, in that lake.

"Then we heard vehicles coming and our Soviet radio speaking. We started to laugh, we were happy – our men were coming! Our Soviet radio was speaking!

"We climbed out of that lake and walked to the village of Malashkovo. You couldn't recognize it – the sand had been yellow, and it had turned black from those, from the shells. Well, then we went from Malashkovo to Zaluga. From the hill we watched what was going on in Lisna. There was a lot of traffic there along the highroad, but what kind we didn't know. Well, and there was some rye sown near the swamp. The men say: 'We have to go look whose footprints they are – German or ours.'

"They went and looked and say: 'They're Germans.'

"It was our men who had driven them there. And we went on. We agreed to walk along one rut so as not to hit a mine. We walked some distance away from that village, and a dead German is lying there.

"'Aha,' we say, 'at least one of them got it!'

"We're standing on that, on the hill. Oh, I got mixed up!... We're already drawing near Lisna, where the sawmill is, and there was our Red Army men's kitchen. They saw us and came running, they hug us and kiss us, and we kiss them and cry, we're glad to see our soldiers at last. And they say that we, they say, have come all the way from Nevel, and we haven't seen a civilian, anywhere, they say, only military men. We say we're also not from that village, we're nine kilometres from here. There wasn't a single person from that village yet, they were all in captivity, those that were alive. Well, and so they gave us tea to drink there, fed us, gave us a greatcoat each, gave us each a knitted German shirt...

"Well, it was frightful how many of those Germans were killed there. A "katyusha" was firing,

when it hit them they went out of their wits with fear and rushed into the lake. And there were many of them in the lake, and it was hot, summertime. We collected them there and buried them so there wouldn't be any infection..."

The beasts also caught the inhabitants of the village of Gorodets, Bykhov District, Mogilyov Region, using their horrible "hunter's tricks", as **Maria Gavrilovna Kovalyova** describes. She and a few other people were able to escape. But the beasts got four hundred and sixty women and children...

"...Well, so we were in the woods. As soon as the Germans come into the village, the people run off into the woods. And once everyone had moved there. They'd burnt Klyonye here, Studenka there – well, of course, people were afraid. Well, and they all ran into the woods: they took children and hens and pigs and everything along there with them..."

All the more so as the nazis had already tried to wipe out Gorodets in 1943. Then the partisans had saved it, as women in the village told us. We learned the exact details from collective-farm team-leader **Pyotr Isakovich Artyomov**, a former partisan who lives in Studenka.

When the partisans in the 425th partisan regiment were informed by messengers that all the inhabitants of Gorodets had been gathered into a few houses to be burnt, they rushed toward the village. They already knew how many Germans and polizeis there were and where their posts

were, "and so we didn't have to disperse throughout the village". The battalion commander was a local resident, Platon Maximovich Tsagelnikov. "Some of the Germans we killed, some took to their heels." The partisans ran up to the houses with the boarded-up windows and doors. At first the people inside them were afraid to respond — what if there were still Germans or *polizeis* in Gorodets, maybe it was their voices they heard...

That time they were rescued. But after going through such an experience, the inhabitants of Gorodets immediately moved to the forest on the second alarm... Here is the continuation of Maria Gavrilovna Kovalyova's account.

"...We live there, and go in to Gorodets to dig up potatoes. To get something, bake some bread. Our houses were standing, see. You'd grind some grain on some millstones somewhere and come into Gorodets at night, bake some bread and carry it back into the woods. Well, so then... They caught one guy here.

"Where are the people?"

"There are the people — in the woods."

"And he led them there. Well, when he'd brought them there, they started to take the women. Some ran away, and some they took. But my husband ran away and I ran away. Well, I ran away and we sat in the swamp for a while... And, in a word, the Germans gave my sister a horse and told her to go. She brought the children to my house. Another family was there, too... And the Germans say: 'Go get your clothes.'

"Everything was there, see, the clothes had been left there, they only took the children. And they, our people, are shouting ... that Rayeva: 'Leyoni-ik, come home!'

"And I came out, too.

"Well, so Maria,' says my sister to me, 'let's go

home, we're already in the house, I lit the stove and baked the children some potatoes, put the children to bed.'

"Well, we drove there, we loaded on the clothes and we drove there. Aha, it was cold; it was autumn. Well, and we're driving home and as soon as we come out of the woods, people are already standing there. They'd already brought the people out. Those that were locked up: they'd picked them up and brought them here before us, those people. As soon as we drove up, they took away our horse and led it into the yard there, to its owner. And they shoved us into that herd. And my sister goes: 'Oh, sir, what about the kinders? The kinders, o my God, where are my kinders?!'

"They're in the house. He takes her to us, to our house: 'Hurry up, hurry up!'

"The German says that. And a woman that had driven back to get her clothes, you know, shouts... She had four or five children. She shouts: 'Mu-ummy, bring the children!'

"Her mother brought out the children — she came out of the house, and my sister went into the house, and my sister's children are sleeping on the stove. And he shut the door and led us away."

QUESTION: "And your sister stayed in the house, with the children?"

"Uh-huh. And a few more women stayed in the house. Well, all right. They herded us to the end of the village. Over there, as you drive in from Bykhov, where the bus stop is now, that's where they herded us. They herded us there right away, well, and drew us up there. They drew us up, well, and made us stand there. My God, the children are screaming. Uh-huh. They went to the other side of the street and immediately — bang, fired a shot. And those children are screaming — 'a-a-a-a!' And one woman from Smolensk — she had four children — and she says: 'Children, what are you screamin' for, they'll play

around with us a bit, frighten us and leave us go.’

“Well, then we also, we also started to mill about then: ‘Oh, women, my dears, what shall we do, where are they going to drive us?’

“‘We’re not going to drive you anywhere,’ says the policeman, ‘we’re going to kill you and burn you. That will be the end of you!’

“Well, and then they shot one more time. Those people started to mill about due to the shot. They immediately made us turn: ‘Komm, Rus, komm, komm, komm into the house!’

“They herded us in there, into that house. There wasn’t any floor there in that house. When there’d been the bombing they’d torn up the floors, that floor and everything. They thought: ‘We’ll go into the woods and sit it out, and when the war ends we’ll come and at least make some kind of dug-out with those boards.’ There wasn’t any floor there. Well, and they drove us in there. And fired a burst at us – dr-r-r-r!... From a machine-gun into the doorway. Some people they killed, some they wounded. They boarded up the door and set that house on fire.

“One fellow there says: ‘Auntie Maria, come over here, there’s a glimmer of light over here.’

“There was this hole, they used to dump potatoes in there.

“‘There’s a glimmer of light! Come on, let’s tear up the earth.’

“And I was wounded. I wasn’t good for anything anymore. I was all covered with blood like this. Barefoot. It was the Feast of the Protection,* there was already a little snow, I was barefoot and already all covered with blood like this, without any coat on! And oh, my God! We started to scratch away at the earth like that, scratched away. It was rather dark there – twilight.

“‘Crawl out, why don’t you crawl out!’

* The feast of the Protecting Veil of the Mother of God, October 14. – *Ed.*

“I crawled out. And he came after me. And when I’d crawled out, I crawled into the holes where they’d once made bricks. And I crawled from hole to hole and toward the kitchen-garden there, there was a yard there and I went that way. O, my God – a dog!... Well, since there’s a dog – I made for the kitchen-garden and crept along, crept along... A little haystack was standing there – I crawled under that haystack on all fours. And I’m already all... A piece of flesh had been torn off here, there’s still the scar there now. Well, and I lie there and think... I lie there and suddenly hear a machine-gun rolling – tr-tr-tr! And Germans. I think, well, it’s all over. I crawled out of there, and now I’m going to die here. I hear Markhvochka shouting: ‘Pe-ople! Go ho-ome, the gentlemen are ca-alling you!’”

QUESTION: “It’s they who made her shout that?”

“They made her. They took her and brought her there. And ordered: ‘Call everyone!’ And she shouts: ‘People! Go home, the gentlemen are calling you!...’”

The better to drive people to exhaustion, force them out of the forest, hunt them down, the beasts had their dogs – the policemen. And the people accordingly dubbed them “mutts”.

The following account is by **Volga Pavlovna Gromovich** from the village of Klinniki, Dokshitsy District, Vitebsk Region.

“...We all collected our stuff and went into the woods. We sat there in the woods. Then lots of those Germans came. There was a policeman from our village there. There were two of them. They immediately came running... They knew where we were hiding. They came running.



Klinniki. Volga Gromovich with her grandson

“Drive home, nobody’s going to touch you. Don’t sit in the woods. They’re not going to touch you, they’re only going to kill the families who are with the partisans. But nobody’s going to kill the others.”

“That was Kharchenok, Kastus, he’s already dead... And Makar Voinich. It’s they who were persuading us to come home. If we’d been in the woods, then maybe we’d have been left alive. But they didn’t leave us alone until we got ready to go home.

“We came home, and lots of Germans had already entered our village. We had two people here with the partisans. And their families were immediately taken away. But they didn’t touch us yet.

“These girls are sitting together in the street. A traitor came and asks: ‘Is Sushko Yulia here?’

“No one says anything — they all keep silent. Then she herself says: ‘She’s here.’

“‘Ah, it’s you?’

“‘Yes.’

“She said it herself. They’d driven their parents away and she didn’t want to be left alone.

“Step forward!”

“And then he asks again: ‘And what about Sushko, Zosya?’

“‘I’m here.’

“They were big girls already. They’d sat all night there in that yard, and early in the morning, around five o’clock they were driven away. Near our house as it so happened, into the meadow over there. And a barn stood there. My mother’s brother happened to be picked up. My mother, as soon as she saw it, she just went all numb.

“‘Mummy dear,’ I say, ‘it will be the same for all of us. Well, so what, they’ll kill us — there’s nothing you can do. Now the varmints found us they’ll kill us...’

“They took them there where the building



stood, and drove them into that building. First they killed them and then they set that building on fire. With a tommy-gun. They ran it over them only three times.

"That very morning they moved away from our village.

"The traitor went to get a horse. And my aunt was there. They'd fired at her but hadn't killed her. She was expecting. She was still alive. She was lying there near the pond. That traitor came to get a horse, and she says: 'Oh, my dear, what did you shoot me for, what did you shoot us for?

We're just poor people, why did we get killed like that? We had a hard life, we want to live, what did you shoot us for like that? Oh-oh-oh! You killed all my family, and you killed my husband. Finish me off, too, so I won't be in this world any longer.'

"That's what... That's how...

"And that 'mutt' — the Germans hadn't left yet then — went and reported it and one of them came and finished her off. My aunt.

"They killed everyone, harnessed up the horses, and left.

"And then we went to look for people. Maybe someone was alive somewhere.

"There didn't turn out to be anyone alive. Only she alone nearly got away and they killed her.

"We brought water... Naturally, people are burning! We doused them. We collected some clothes, carried the dead to the graveyard and buried them.

"That's all.

"My Daddy was lying dead in the kitchen-garden, too.

"We took a large chest, gathered what was left of them and put it in that chest – and took it to the graveyard..."

The people who were brought the nazis' "new order" settled in the woods, digging burrows and making their homes in them to escape the beasts in uniform. Here is an account by **Zinaida Ivanovna Putronok** from the village of Borkovichi, Verkhnedvinsk District, Vitebsk Region.

"...We built dug-outs in the woods. And lived there until the expedition. When the expedition started in winter, part of the partisans broke through... But we stayed there. Three of us families lived in the swamp while the expedition went on. The expedition passed right next to us, but we just managed to... We'd just gone into the swamp and snow fell. It was just before New Year. In forty-three, I think, in the winter. We didn't take our cattle. There were only four of us there: my mother and three sisters. And there were two other families there. We were three families. We went off into that swamp without our cattle. The snow fell and covered our tracks, and the expedition passed by in the night. I remember the Germans celebrated New Year, they fired a salute at

twelve o'clock. New Year. And we heard everything – heard the talking and the shooting, everything, but survived. The Germans didn't guess. But those who were carting things away with horses and herding cattle, all those the expedition caught up with and shot. We came out afterwards, when everything had grown quiet, and walked through the woods – it was a horrible scene. We walked through to our dug-outs – corpses, horses and cows were lying shot – the scene was horrible.

"The second expedition took place in summer. That was, I believe, already in forty-four. In the summer, we were already sitting in hiding-places. Orlovsky, I remember his name, came from the partisan detachment, addressed the population and told them how to build those hiding-places. We built the hiding-places. Each family built itself a hiding-place. Just so the whole family could sit in there. We neatly cut the turf. You trace a square like this. We set aside the turf, dug out all the sand, so you could sit in there, dug out this hole. We put the sand in baskets, carried it far away and hid it under the moss. The Germans already knew that hiding-places like these existed and when the expedition was going on they looked for them. We carefully camouflaged all that: sprinkled sand over it all, laid on thick boards so they wouldn't sag, and placed the turf back evenly on top. Everything as it was – back on top of those boards. Then we sprinkled pine needles over the turf. Exactly like the forest growing around. And we made it so you could breathe. You had to dig under a big tree, near a big tree, and under the roots, so there'd be an opening, several of them. So that when you sit you can breathe a little air. You couldn't sit there long, only the moment the expedition went by. Afterwards you'd crawl out of that hiding-place – you'd be just yellow, and in general – you'd feel

dizzy. In the earth, entirely in the earth.

"When the second expedition came, we had a hiding-place. And there was this Kukharyonok and Chagak living in the woods, too. They were from Borkovichi. Made off from the Germans into the partisan zone they had. That Kukharyonok was walking through the woods and happened to bump into a German cordon, into an expedition, ran into the Germans themselves. And he lost his head, well, and ran back to his camp. But the Germans only laughed, because they knew that everything was cordoned off on all sides, three cordons were advancing.

"As soon as he ran up he waved his arm: 'The Germans are coming!' We doused the fire that was burning... We had a dug-out above ground when we lived in the open. And we immediately all got into the hiding-place. As soon as we had climbed into our hiding-places... We'd made this little trapdoor on hinges, propped it up with a stick, and we climbed in there. You'd lie down and stick your legs down in there... We all climbed into the hiding-places, and then you'd lower that stick.

"The Germans came and blew up the dug-out. We heard them talking in German, they scattered what things were there. They walked right over our hiding-place; crunch-crunch-crunch — go the twigs under their feet...

"We made those hiding-places so carefully, that there were three families there and we all knew approximately where whose hiding-place was, but sometimes we ourselves couldn't find that little door to raise it. Each other's.

"And Kukharyonok there, when that expedition had passed, he climbed out of his hiding-place first and decided to come and give us a signal that the Germans had gone. And he knew where our hiding-place was, and didn't find it. We hear him walking around and calling us by our

last name, calling out that the Germans, you know, have passed, but we don't believe it: what if the Germans made him show our hiding-place. But then we raised the door a bit, saw through the crack that it was Kukharyonok alone, that there weren't any Germans — and we ourselves climbed out.

"And Chagak hadn't had time to completely finish his hiding-place, he had camouflaged it but he hadn't had time to make that door on hinges through which you had to climb into the hiding-place. So they all hopped into the hiding-place, took a spruce in their hands, crouched down in that... Well, there was just room for a person to crouch... And they took a spruce tree. And held it there. And they sat there more dead than alive, they saw everything through those branches. They sat there and saw a German walk up, nearly just about step on it with his foot, stop and look. They were already prepared: if the German stepped on it, he'd fall into their hole, and they'd prepared some strings there to immediately shut his mouth, so he'd neither shout nor squeak...

"That's how we sat through two expeditions in the woods...

"When the Red Army came, all the grown-ups ran off for joy and left us children behind, and we sit there and don't know what to do. The grown-ups are celebrating there and the soldiers say that they've come far but only here have they met civilians. Everything was burnt everywhere.

"A couple of hours later the grown-ups came back and announced to us children that we'd been liberated — that it was time to leave the woods..."

They hunted people, killed whole villages, and suddenly ... A little girl lying among the corpses in her house heard: "O, how good the bread smells in the stove! Get it out, 'cause I'm as hungry as

a wolf!"

"A wolf!..." He said, and probably thought that it was only his appetite that was "wolfish". But he himself was a man and even "superman". In fact he was something you cannot compare to any wild animal for fear of offending the beast.

Once again, through a person's blazing memory, let us plunge back into the horrible past which the beasts hunting in nazi uniform wanted to make our future, daily reality for millions of people. This time the story-teller is **Ganna Andreyevna Yatskevich** from the village of Kondratovich, Logoisk District, Minsk Region.

"...I had a husband, but now he's dead, my man. He was hiding with the baby boy. He came home and went to sleep. It started to rain. And I went and got some potatoes out of the hole — it was not far away. I climbed out of the hole, looked around — there isn't anybody anywhere...

"And there was this man, an invalid, he's riding by on horseback and says: 'Dump your potatoes,' he says, 'we're already surrounded.'

"I dashed into the house and tell him... He was sleeping, and the little baby with him, a little lad, he's already in the Army now. He was in the Army and now he's already done his service and is back home. And I went up to him, grabbed him out of his cradle, and there was this big shawl — I put it on him, wrapped him up. And then there was also a little girl, and an older lad, and my husband, too. They had been hiding with the horse and had now climbed onto the stove — they were warming up. I tell them to climb off the stove, that we're already surrounded. He jumped off the stove. And that lad, too, the older one. And we rushed off in that direction — we'd hide somewhere. But we were already surrounded...

"We came back from there to our apartment.

What shall we do, where shall we hide? A neighbour came, too.

"What are you going to do?"

"You don't know where to dash, we're already surrounded.

"The neighbour's wife came and also asks what we're going to do.

"Nothing," I say.

"I lit the stove and put on a pot of potatoes... What do I need them for?... I was already unconscious of what I was doing. And they left, the neighbour and his wife. They took the lighter and left, to kindle their stove too.

"Then my husband looks out the window — at the village like that, and then says: 'Well, woman, we're going to make off: the Germans are already coming from that direction and herding people along.'

"Then ... he knocked out a window with his fist... He climbed out himself, and then took that little baby and carried it in front of him... There was a large orchard there, the school's, and he went into that orchard. And I looked through the window once more — none of them is left, the house is open... And we went into that orchard to slip into the woods afterwards. He peeked out and says: 'We can't go anywhere anymore, there's no way we can go into the woods anymore. The house is already burning.'

"Well, where can we go? Germans are already standing there where I got the potatoes, next to that hole. There're Germans here and there're Germans there. And so he says, my husband: 'There's nowhere we can run away to anymore.'

"There was this big willow, and little suckers shooting up from that willow. And we hid in there, the four of us: two little lads, and that baby, we rock him in our arms so he won't cry. And the older one lay face down like this, bent down, near us. And the oldest girl, she'd got separated from

us... There was a field of rye there. She wanted to hide in the gully, but they shot at her and she went into the rye.

"We're sitting in that bush, four of us. We're sitting like this in that willow, and right there nearby is a path. And Germans are walking along that path. And they're carrying tommy-guns like this, but they're looking the other way, into the woods. We're sitting at their feet... I say: 'Shall we take off?'"

"And he says: 'Don't show yourself.'"

"The grass is tall, like this, up to your waist, and we're sitting like this.

"I didn't understand anything. They were burning the school already, killing people – well, I didn't understand anything, that they were burning and killing... He still understood, he was a man, and he still understood a bit more..."

"The younger lad started to cry... The houses are already burning around us, we don't see anything behind the smoke, and that baby starts to cry: 'Gimme mush!'"

"My man says: 'This is no place for us.'"

"The other, older lad went crawling through the grass and gave him some gooseberries. Just like now, green and unripe, he picked them for him and says: 'Here, eat it! Just shut up!'"

"He, the baby, ate those gooseberries, ate them all and cries. Of course, on an empty stomach.

"Well, they've already burnt everything around us there, near us, and it's already burning at the other end, and they're shooting there and everything.

"He came out, looked a bit and says: 'This is no place for us. The child is crying. Let's go into the gully there with him.'"

"I threw him like this over my shoulder and went into that gully. And then – Moshchenka was already burning there, there was smoke already. I went through the woods then – like

this – and then – there's this ditch there on the hill – I got into that ditch with the child... And now I don't know who's where anymore. He was looking for the oldest girl – in the rye, everywhere... They killed our horse, he found it in the field. But that little girl had already run out of the field... I had a sister there, in another village, and she's running and crying... And then a woman came out and said: 'Don't cry, little girl: your Mummy's right here with the baby.'

"I left her there and myself came running to see what was going on here. They'd driven away the cattle, driven it all away. And we had a cow which had only just calved, and it had made off from the field. And I thought that it would run away like that from them too, from the Germans. So I climbed onto a hillock and looked..."

"And he says: 'Don't look for the cow! Let's go somewhere for the night.'"

"Well, where'll we go, – we'll go where the child is."

"We went there and spent the night in that village, came back – well, what can you do, there's nothing to eat, there's nothing at all. There were still some potatoes there, and we took some potatoes and were going to boil them.

"We'd just started to boil them on that fire site when a German comes crawling out of there, out of the forest... My man looked and said: 'This is no place to be, let's leave those potatoes...'"

"And we left. And I'd also hidden a small pitcher of milk in the woodpile. And it hadn't burnt, that wood. We grabbed that pitcher, hid in the rye field and gave it to the baby. He even had his head washed, and ate, everything there! (*She laughs.*) He was just a baby! So at least he wouldn't cry. Well, and we sat there until evening. And then in the evening... There was a village there, three kilometres away. And he says: 'It's getting dark. Let's go to that village, maybe they'll





Milkmaid Alyona Batura

let us spend the night there.'

"We spent the night there in that village. And they came here again the next day... They hadn't burnt two of the houses yet, they were waiting for people to come together again. Well, who'd go into those houses anyway? Nobody went. The next day those Germans came, shot around here, took pigs, caught some more hens and burnt those two houses then..."

Listen to the tale of **Alyona Ilyinichna Batura** from the village of Zasovye, Logoisk District.

"...They didn't say anything among themselves. Only to my mother. They asked where her sons were..."

"They went to the next house, to the neighbour's. And I was left alone. What was I to do? I climbed off that stove. Then I hear a shot at the neighbour's. Mummy is lying there like that, killed. The blood is gushing like a fountain. My brother and sister are lying killed on the bed, the blood is gushing like a fountain. What was I to do? I still clung to life. That's one's fate in this world. I then opened the cellar, a couple of little planks over it, climbed into that cellar and closed up the opening and sat in there all alone. When I climbed in there, I saw that one house was burning... Probably they'll burn this one, too, I thought. It will be worse for me to suffocate in the smoke – better let them shoot me! Let's crawl out. And when I'd crawled into that cellar, Mummy was lying there like that, killed on the floor, and I had a white blouse on and it got soaked with blood. The shoulders got soaked with blood. I didn't even see it, it's only afterwards I noticed it. I climbed out and crawled out into

the vegetable garden. There were two vegetable beds in it, Mummy had planted beets there. I crawled into the furrow, lay down on my stomach, sprawled out – let them kill me here... I hear them rattling away at the neighbour's... I wished the earth would sink under me, real deep like this. Afterwards I hear them coming to burn our house.

"'She was probably running away,' they say, 'and they killed her in the garden.'

"I hear that, I hear it, and I won't turn over, I can't... When they shoot me like that... I saw how they killed Mummy... I won't turn, I won't even turn my head – kill me!... I lie there, I lie there like that... They went on and set the house afire. The house is burning and sparks are flying on to me... I'm already having a hard time. The sparks are showering down. Where my blouse is dry it's smouldering. I take some earth like this and ease things a bit like this. I strew it on me and I feel easier. I feel it scorching here, smouldering near my waist. I again strew some on with my hand... And they, see, had busied themselves with the neighbours, had gone to burn the neighbours' house. Oh, how hard, how awful it was! I hear them both talking Russian and ger-gerring... There's no way I can crawl out. And afterwards they went to the third house to kill the people. Then I – like this, like this, doing the leopard-crawl, as they say, using my elbows, my elbows, like some kind of snake, slithered out of those vegetable beds and slithered in there where the potatoes were planted. And I'm lying in a furrow. There's shooting. The bullets go tiv-tiv-tiv! The village is burning, beams are collapsing, sparks flying... Oh, the end of the world. I thought I'd been left alone in the world. It was the end of the world and I was alone, what would I do alone? I was scared to live alone... I think it's like this in all the other villages, and that it's the end of the

world, and there won't be any more people. And there won't be any world.

"I lay there, lay until everything had burnt up. Only afterwards, when the sun had passed noon, did I sit up. It had grown quiet – no bullets are whistling, nothing... I look and see that Amlishevo, another village, is burning. It's the end, I think, everything's finished... What should I do? But the village of Goreloye there isn't burning. I think: I'll go there, there're people there. I picked myself up and went. I walked through the village, barefoot, near naked, with those, my shoulders, all bloody... There, beyond the stream, that's Goreloye. I walked by my village... The whole village is burning, these bodies are sizzling, burning with a blue flame – people burning. I take a look – and there's only one way for me: I go toward that village that was left..."

"I looked back and a guy is running after me. When I looked back he waved and waved his arm, and I put on more speed, put on more speed!... And that guy comes after me. He's running, and I think it's a German in overalls. I hid behind a bush. I'd already lost my strength, couldn't go on any further..."

"...I shielded myself behind a bush – well, here they'd kill me now... I closed my eyes like this and sit there..."

"That guy comes up.

"Who's that?" he says.

"I look and see someone I know, Vladya Neverka.

"Oh," he says, 'how were you left all by yourself?'

"I grabbed hold of him, and he says: 'Quiet, don't cry. I was also left with just my wife, they killed my whole family. They killed my mother, too. But I ran out through the window. Let's go to Amlishevo, to the swamp.'

"And Amlishevo is burning... It had all burnt

up and the villagers are sitting in the swamp. And my aunt was in Amlishevo. I was glad to see that guy: that there was still someone left in the world! And he even said my aunt might still be alive, sitting in the swamp..."

"And I went there with that man to the swamp. I got there and really did find my aunt with her family, and we started to..."

"Oh, oh, how hard it was..."

"In the swamp I noticed that my shoulders were all bloody – from Mummy and my brother, from my sister... It had dripped, flowed from the bed. It was Mummy's blood had saved me, only Mama's blood.

"If it hadn't been for that blood on me, they might very well have shot me up.

"I lived alone, alone, and then I got married, and my marriage was bad – my husband was a bit of a crook, he left me, left the children, three children, three girls. And I struggle to bring them up, try hard for them. True, the first one got married, she finished high school and got married – got married for my sake:

"'Mummy,' she says, 'we'll bring up the younger ones. I'll help you in your old age.'

"She's a good girl, lives in Lonvo. One of them is studying at the technical college and the youngest has finished eight forms and also wants to study further. I'm left alone – I came out alive from the bullets, from that blood, so let my children at least live and get on in the world..."

Volga Fominichna Gaidash from the village of Pervomaisk, Rechitsa District, Gomel Region, told us the following story.

"...On May 14, '43, the Germans burnt our village. My husband had gone off with the partisans



"And this land will be ours forever..."

From Hitler's speech, 1941



in the autumn of forty-two, and two weeks later we moved into the woods. About eighty people from our village went with the partisans. We partisan families sat in the woods all winter. Afterwards they came to us and told us: 'Those who are with the partisans, don't be afraid, they won't shoot you.'

"Our people told us that, and they were told by the Germans. Well, so we went home. I had also been in the woods with our horse. I spent the night at my brother's and then my mother comes, my mother-in-law. And she says the police came and said I should be home the next day at ten o'clock and not go away anywhere.

"Well, I got scared that they were hunting me.

"I slaughtered a sheep. I was going to run away into the woods again... I'm skinning that sheep at eleven o'clock.

"They come and knock in the evening. There was no light then, just an oil-lamp.

"They knocked and I got scared and lost my head.

"I had three children: a son born in thirty-five and a daughter born in thirty-seven, and the youngest daughter was born in thirty-nine. She's sitting next to me, and there's nowhere I can go. And I was also scared because they were after my husband's clothes: he had box-calf boots and a leather jacket. They wanted to take them from me.

"I got scared. And we had a place under the stove there where we drove the hens. My mother-in-law went to open the door and I shot under that stove, because I was afraid. And the children, the older ones that were on the stove, didn't see where I was. And the youngest one sat there.

"And my mother says: 'She was just here, I don't know where she's gone to.'

"She thought I'd slipped out into the yard behind her, she hadn't seen me hide under the

stove...

"Well, so tell her to be home tomorrow at ten.'

"They drove off, and then I harnessed up the horse, put the unskinned sheep on the wagon and headed for the woods. Two of the children went with me, but the youngest stayed with her grandmother. My mother didn't let her go. She'd frozen in those woods as it was. The next morning at ten they came and picked up my mother and the child. She even sang them a song, the little girl... Four years old she was. And they shot her there together with everyone. They killed thirteen people then, old women and children...

"And in May, on the thirteenth, they came to us in the woods and said... We were living there in the woods, an old man was ploughing, and they called to that old man and said: 'Tell those people who are living in the woods to go home. We'll kill those who're in the woods.'

"And they walked around in the forest, and whoever they caught in the shacks they shot: little children and old people. People got scared: they all gathered their stuff and drove into the village at night. It was just like a transport column coming out of those woods. In the morning we came home.

"This old man is walking around there saying: 'Those who are partisans, we're not going to hide in the woods because of them, because of the partisan families...'

"Well, I was a partisan family, I just had to keep quiet.

"I went to my neighbour, he was our friend, and ask him: 'What'll we do, Brel?'

"And he says: 'Everyone can go where they want, but my family is innocent, I'm not going to be responsible for anyone.'

"They picked him up with his family then, and he and his children were all burnt.

"Well, they started to herd away the cattle, the

calves. They herded the people together. One old woman was left here, she was also from a partisan family. She had run here from her village, to our land, that Khalikha. I ask her: 'Auntie, do they herd only the partisan families or all the villagers together?'

"And she says: 'They drive everyone into sheds and houses, both those who are partisans' families and those who aren't.'

"Well, I'm standing with my children in the street. Near my house. I'm standing in the doorway. They drove by one bunch, they drove by another. My sister's daughter was in Germany, and my sister had a few letters, and I ask her: 'Where are you going, Tatyana?'

"And she says: 'You hide, and I'll go there: I have a letter, so maybe they'll take me to Germany?'

"Her daughter was in Germany and two others were home, and her son was with the partisans. She thought her letters would save her. They herded them into houses there and I stood waiting where I'd been standing. I had this thought: I'd gone and had a stiff drink, and I thought they might as well kill us on the run. And I told the children: 'Kids, we'll run away, so they'll kill us that way.'

"The Germans are carting calves down the street, and then just three come along, driving women, old women. One of them, this real young fellow, obviously a pure German. He comes up to me. And my little boy... He was wearing hat — this helmet it was, with a knob on top. A Red Army hat. And the German grabbed that knob, lifted the hat over the boy's head, then put it back on him again. I'm holding the little lad's hand in this hand, and my daughter's in the other. The German again took the hat off him and again put it back. And then, the third time, he grabbed him like this under the armpits and lifted him up. And

I, you know, think he's going to hurl him down and kill him. He set him down. He again lifted off that hat and again lowered it.

"And then I say: 'Sir, I'll go get my child.'

"I didn't have the child anymore then, but it flashed into my mind. And he laughed and said: 'Go ahead!'

"He himself left. And we went into our own yard. Well, we went into the house — there was nothing to take. And I thought he would be on the watch and kill us. There was a cat and her kittens behind the stove. I wrapped up that cat and kittens in a shawl and carried them out into the yard.

"That son of mine looked and said: 'Mummy, there isn't anyone anymore, they've gone. Let's stick a pole down the well and hide in there.'

"We lowered in a pole, the children climbed in and I climbed in, but I can be seen like that.

"'No, we'll be done for like this, children!'

"We climbed out into the vegetable garden. We had a dug-out there. And the neighbour woman was already sitting in that dug-out, four people. And another woman comes running with her children, and she has a little baby in her arms. She also went in there. Those children started to howl. Well, so we got out of there. I crawled out with my children and see three people running after that woman. Germans. They're running — well, there's nowhere I can go anymore. I dove into a furrow like this. And my children tumbled into the furrow between rows. They went into that dug-out, drove out that woman, she had two daughters, and there was also another woman in there. They beat them up and drove them into the village. And the earth is already groaning in the village, burning, people screaming!... The way it all was — it was downright dismal to lie there. That other lad ran back toward the dug-out, he

thought I was in the dug-out. And the other neighbour's son ran away. Well, they didn't go into the dug-out because I told them to get into the furrow as they'd be driven out of the dug-out. They lay down in the furrow. And my two children and I. All five of us in the furrow. The Germans ran over us lying in the furrow. And that cat and her kittens are lying near me, and a doll I was going to take to Germany... Eggs, a piece of salt pork and a hunk of bread. They crushed that doll of mine with their feet and, you know, ran on. I think to myself: 'Did they think we'd been killed?' They ran over us. Then they come running again, burning the houses, then the sheds, our barns. The village is burning. There's smoke already. A stack of straw was standing near my head, and I lost my head when he started to kindle that straw with a lighter... I was wearing that leather jacket and the box-calf boots, because I thought: I'll burn up myself and everything on me will burn. I lost my head, but the children are sleeping – my two and the others. My arms were lying on the back of my head like this, and one of my arms slipped down. He stepped on my arm and crossed over... And they went away. They set fire to the straw. But the children are lying fast asleep. Only when the straw began to blaze and our shed began to blaze and the flames started to scorch – the children are burning: the shirts on them are burning, and their hair. My little lad was

already all singed, he screams: 'Oh, Mummy! I can't lie any more!'

"And I tell him: 'Lie there!'

"And there's a little road here, this little street of ours here, near the school. We turned in there, and they're firing at us, shooting, the bullets are spilling forth like beans. We lay there again, and that little lad of mine got up... There were these little pits for storing potatoes there, and I carried them over there.

"The sun was already setting. It was evening. This quiet evening. Posts are standing there burning, and I keep thinking it's Germans standing there. I crossed over here, and my horse is standing there in the yard. Only my dried bread had been stolen from the cart.

"Then, that evening, I went to look who'd been left alive in the woods...

"My little lad was eight, and the little girl, six, in her seventh year. And they shot the younger one, as I told you.

"A woman, a neighbour, heard what she sang them. She was there and saw my mother-in-law get into the cart, and bade farewell to all. And my younger daughter, four years old she was, said: 'Sirs, don't take me with granny, I'll sing you a little song that's called "I'll sow cucumbers"' *

"She sang it to them standing on the window-sill, and they took her along and shot her..."

* Byelorussian folk song.

Genghiz Khan Equipped with the Telegraph

By the late 19th century, the telegraph had become a vital tool for communication, and its use spread across the globe. One of the most famous examples of its application was in the case of Genghiz Khan, who is said to have used the telegraph to coordinate his military campaigns.

According to legend, Genghiz Khan was the first to use the telegraph, and he did so with great success. He used the telegraph to send messages to his generals and to coordinate his movements, which allowed him to conquer a vast empire.

The telegraph was a revolutionary invention, and it changed the way people communicated. It allowed for instant communication over long distances, which was a major breakthrough at the time.

Today, the telegraph is still used in some parts of the world, but it has largely been replaced by other forms of communication, such as the telephone and the internet.

Despite its decline, the telegraph remains an important part of history, and it is a testament to the power of human innovation.

The telegraph was a revolutionary invention, and it changed the way people communicated. It allowed for instant communication over long distances, which was a major breakthrough at the time.

"Here's how I'll tell it. We lived together — my mother-in-law, father-in-law, sister-in-law and I. My sister-in-law already had children, and so did I. My father-in-law harnessed the horse and drove us away into the forest. My mother-in-law remained behind all alone in the house. She remained behind because she was so old and feeble.

"My father-in-law went back to see how she was faring, but she wasn't in the house anymore.

"What *they* did was throw her down the well, this little well. She was alive when they did it. She just had a small hole here in the head, where she struck it when she fell. Then they dumped all the odd rags scattered about the house into that well — all the bedding, coats and pillows. There was this heavy oak log and they jammed it in on top of those rags so they wouldn't float to the surface. There was also a two-axle cart, and this they overturned, removed two of the wheels and shoved them down that well, and then they went and filled all the holes with earth; you couldn't see anything but a single wheel sticking out...

"She lay three weeks to the day. They threw her in on a Sunday and it was on a Sunday that we dug her out..." (**Ganna Mikitovna Kapshai** Pogulyanka Village, Rechitsa District, Gomel Region.)

"It was early in the morning, the Germans shot them right in bed. One man, Makar Denisov, they shot seventeen times, in his arms and legs, before they killed him. They did the same with all the rest. Killed them by inches. So they'd suffer more..." (**Alina Yegorovna Stepanova**. Rovnoye Village, Shumilino District, Vitebsk Region.)

"...He caught my mother, my mother-in-law, as she was trying to escape through the window. And he started hitting her with the butt of an axe. Scared to death, she'd hidden under the stove and crouched there till evening. Then she crawled out and made for the window to get away. But he came after her, showering blows on her shoulders with the butt of the axe. She would fall and pick herself up again while he went on striking her..." (**Ustinya Artyomovna Volkova**. Zhary Village, Ushachi District, Vitebsk Region.)

"...They placed me atop of that mortar three times. My back was as black as pitch. People saw it. There was this mortar, you know, the kind they used to pound cereals in. They turned that mortar upside down, laid you on top with your hands twisted crosswise behind your back and held you there while they beat you. They put me on there three times and beat me asking: 'Where are the partisans?' They herded us into a house. They killed six villagers before it was my turn. The tortments they invented! They'd place them on the mortar, their heads toward the threshold. They'd carve up their bodies... Heat an iron rod and hold it to them... They killed six people before my turn came. All fifteen or sixteen at the most. 'You partisans! You don't let us get a wink of sleep!' And they beat us.

"I was barely alive. When I came to, I saw people scattering in all directions and houses on fire..." (**Maria Alexeyevna Gladyshevskaya**. Mosar Village, Ushachi District, Vitebsk Region.)

"They caught a young girl from our village and raped her. She was found later in the cemetery. She lay there dead with a candy ... between her teeth. They killed another in the orchard. She lay flat on her back like this, partly covered with

earth – we examined the body later. Her dress was all torn...” (**Ganna Zakharovna Dyadyola**. Vidoki Village, Verkhnedvinsk District, Vitebsk Region.)

The old woman who told us this story is now over eighty, bed-ridden and feeble. Her daughter Barbara Yasukevich and her neighbour Natalya Podgaiskaya, who were in the house with her, remember those days very clearly and in a whisper added the detail about the candy. The old woman couldn't bring herself to speak about it, either out of tact or respect for the memory of the poor girl.

“How she screamed! We all just went numb. There was this big nail right there in the bath-house; it must have been eight inches long. And they took that nail and drove it into her breast. Drove that home-made nail into her breast...”

“As for my aunt, they raised her on their bayonets.” (**Ganna Prokopovna Gribovskaya**. Latygovo Village, Verkhnedvinsk District, Vitebsk Region.)

“...Before they shot people they would make their fun of them. How they stabbed people with pitchforks, and trampled them underfoot and beat them, my Heavens! There were little children among us, whom they trampled upon. Some of the little ones were told the Germans liked eggs, so the poor kid would come bringing him eggs and beg for mercy. But he would kick him hard with his boot so the child toppled over and then the German would tread on him.” (**Maria Mikhailovna Skok**. Pavlovichi Village, Slonim District, Grodno Region.)

It is appropriate here to recall Akulina Ivanova's story* of the nazi officer who was not

* See the chapter “It Was Awful There in the Earth”.

satisfied with trampling underfoot the children, women and old people lying on a pile of dung in the shed, so he brought in his horse...

Such primitive brutality dates back to the ancient barbarians. But there was also brutality in a new, refined form assisted by modern technology – mines, for instance.

Here are some recollections by old **Alexandra Naumovna Akushevich** from Stolpishche Village, Kirovsk District, Mogilyov Region.

“There, in the cell, were some two hundred people from different villages. I had two little girls with me, my nieces. And our planes raided the place. So they attached mines to us. Shot us down and mined us.

“I wasn't killed but only wounded in both legs. The bullet hit one leg, and the other was broken. I pretended I was dead, and lay stretched out like this, all soaked in the blood of those that were killed...”

“One of them shot us down with his tommy-gun, while the other marked us down. Then they looked around to make sure all were dead and brought along this thing... And placed it down... And I thought, you know, it was some old hunk of metal maybe. How was I to know it was a mine?

“So we're lying there. There were another two with me who also weren't killed: this woman and my niece, the younger one. The woman got to her feet and says: ‘You know what, they're retreating!’ And I says: ‘Lie where you are without speaking. Let's keep mum.’

“But she climbed up into the attic.

“Well I lay there till our soldiers came. I heard them open the door. They opened the door, glanced in and went on – our boys, I mean, Reds. I began to moan and call out. There was a woman among them, she stuck her head in over the



Alexandra Akushevich

threshold and exclaimed: 'Oh my goodness! There's a woman who's alive!... Mother, don't stand on that wire; you're mined in there!...'

"They stood on the threshold in tears. Our people. I woke the little girl up, who was alive, the younger one. She had fallen asleep. She was only five. Our people called to her: 'Come here, dearie!'

"Go away, you Germans,' she answers. 'You killed my mummy, I won't go to you!'

"But the soldiers lifted her over the mine somehow. A mine was lying there, remember!... I only hear them talk about it. I'm lying there all atremble. They say to me: 'Mother, hold out your

hands to us and throw the bodies off you.'

"How could I throw them off?... So one of them took hold of me, another held on to him and a third held on to the second – and they started pulling. When they pulled me, my leg that was broken got caught in that mine, in the wire. It got caught in the wire and the mine went off – bang! Exploded. All three of them were wounded. And I'm screaming: 'My legs are torn off!'

"I ask for some water, but he says: 'There isn't any water.'

"They had poisoned it, those Germans!

"Don't you worry, mother,' he tells me after taking a look, 'your legs are all right.'



“They bandaged me up and the soldiers, too, and drove us away.”

Then there was the radio. It was used not only to coordinate the work of the punitive expeditions, but also as a means of entertainment.

Avdotyа Ivanovna Yermolovich from the village of Svyataya Volya (Ivatsevichi District, Brest Region), who was a child during the war and is now a mother, or rather a widow, with small children on her hands, told us about this kind of entertainment. She could not keep back her tears as she recalled how they, several kids, had hidden

inside a log-lined empty well, filled with earth almost to the top and overgrown with tall weeds. They could hear screams, wailing and shooting coming from the village where their mothers, grannies and little brothers and sisters had remained behind, unable to make off.

The Germans switched on the radio in their truck to play deafening music and songs, and through the din the children could hear little of what was going on. Neither did they see everything. Agile Dyanka, as they called Avdotya Ivanovna in those days, was lifted up the wall of the well where she saw — she can still see it to this day! — the Germans gun down a group of vil-

lagers and then, rolling up their sleeves, wash their hands in a big tub and dry them on embroidered white towels before starting to shoot again to the sounds of the music, which kept them amused...

There were also the airplanes. Here is the story of a test of strength between a feeble old woman and a Luftwaffe warplane. **Zinaida Ivanovna Putronok**, secretary of the rural Soviet in Borkovich Village, Verkhnedvinsk District, Vitebsk Region, who told it to us, was a girl of nine at the time and lived in Volki, her native village, where the incident took place.

"...Hardly had we managed to hide in that forest, when the second group of planes attacked and began setting the houses in the village on fire, using some kind of liquid. Old Voroshilova... Her son now lives in Miory District. But at the time he was at the front. She had a large family – seven children... There was nobody but she left in the house, and she defended it to the end. They set it on fire three times but she put the flames out with sand all three times... Well, after that she just couldn't anymore. The plane dived ever so low and once again set it on fire. She was all covered with burns and had no more strength left in her, so she made for the forest – we called it Staroseka. In the end, the Germans burnt down our whole village."

Four hundred and seventy-six people were killed in Lozki Village, Kalinkovichi District, Gomel Region. On June 22, 1942, an armoured train was used here against the old men, children, women and other unarmed civilians. It was all very convenient, for the village lay along the railway line well within firing range.

Says **Katerina Danilovna Krot**:

"Well, on that day I ... I had a sister and a father – my mother was no longer alive. The three of us lived together..."

"I just can't talk about it... (*Bursts into tears.*)"

"I was at work with my sister when it all began. Shooting started. We heard a train approaching and then shooting start up. We came home..."

"What's the way I am – I just can't go on..."

Obviously a strong-willed and energetic woman in the past, she now bit her lips and fell silent, afraid lest she should burst into tears again.

The owner of the house we were sitting in, **Volga Iosifovna Veka**, who is a little older than the narrator, also lived through that terrible shooting. The mistress of the house, tempered by her suffering, was standing by her unheated white-tile stove, her arms behind her back. Quietly but with deep understanding she addressed her weeping friend, who had come to visit from the neighbouring village, where she lived with her husband: "Don't cry, dear, you have to endure it. One has to be patient."

Patient endurance is really a quality innate in our people.

Gradually the other woman calmed down and continued her story.

"The end of the village where the shooting was going on was already all in flames, set on fire from the train. There must have been about fifty of us who ran out into the street, and somebody says: 'Girls, let's flee to the forest!'"

"But my sister said she wouldn't go. Because people had said they would shoot you down

anyway from the air and she was scared, but they didn't...

"So the Germans gathered us together and drive us straight into the flames. We beg for mercy but they just drive us into the yard across the street and meantime set the shed there on fire. How I want, oh how I want to get away!... I tried once. There was a rye field near the street and I wanted to dive into it but a German noticed me, shouted something and pointed his rifle at me. So I had to follow the rest. We walk on like that and see a whole lot of Germans where the fires were. We were now near the centre, where we lived, our family, and there was this lone house there which wasn't burnt down and was all nicely fenced in. My friend was walking by my side. And she says: 'Let's run there!'

"The wind was blowing straight in this direction and everything had burnt down, the orchards and all. I was walking maybe some ten metres in front. Then I turned to look back like this, and that girl ran this way, and I that way. Those two Germans didn't notice me, nor did the third. I ran right into the yard and into the potato field and then the rye and began crawling away. The rest of the people were led away.

"I crawled maybe a hundred metres away from the village and lay in the rye field, thinking: 'What are they going to do with them there?' Actually I was pretty far away from them, from where they were burning the people, perhaps four hundred metres or more. I lie there listening and they're rat-tat-tatting away at them with tommy-guns.

"They were shooting down those they'd driven into the house. I lie and lie there and see all the houses go up in flames, and the village was all lit up. It became as light as day, though it was almost evening.

"And the train travelled backward and forward

along the track, firing away with machine-guns and everything. It even cut down the rye like a scythe.

"And I'm lying in a furrow. Because I heard the men say you had to take shelter in a hole, like at the front. I'm lying with my head towards the track but the train seems to be rolling by at my feet. I was so scared I felt numb all over. I lay for what seemed ages, until it began to grow dark. I heard the trucks hooting in the direction of Vasilevichi. The train left, too. The one that did the shooting.

"Then I got to my feet in the rye, went back to our yard and called out thinking there might be somebody there. But nobody answers, only the cows are mooing and the cats meowing and the dogs barking... What should I do? Where should I go?... I thought I'd collect the stuff I had left behind, and make for the forest.

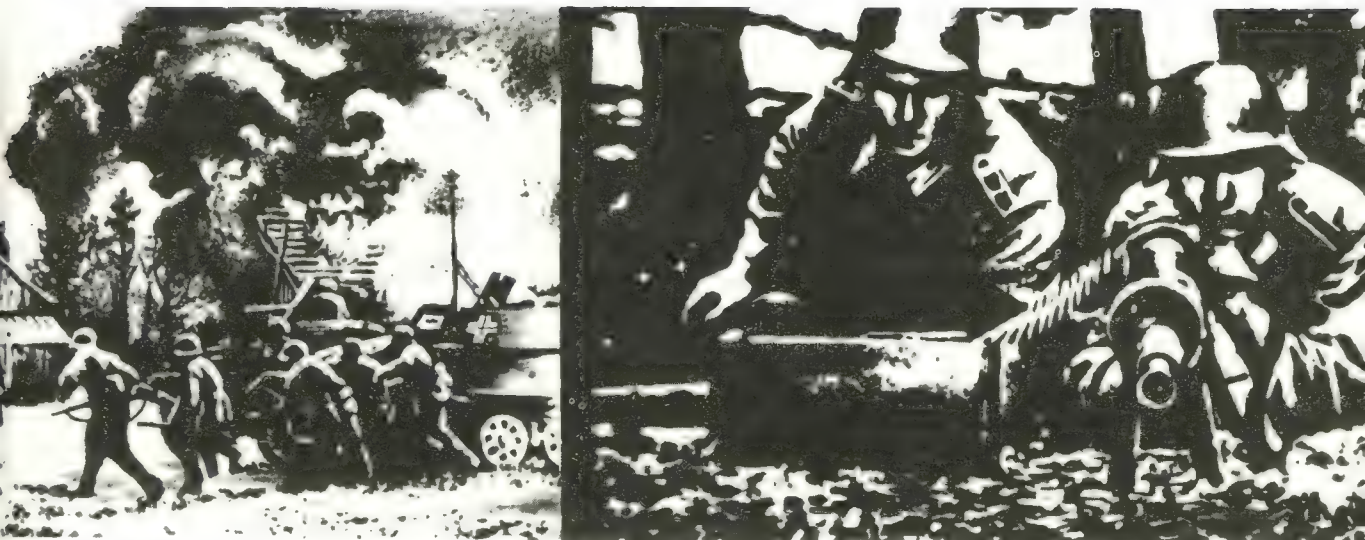
"I go over there and all the things are just as I left them but there aren't any people, and it's already getting dark. Then I met my first cousin, and she told me all the other villagers had been burnt..."

An armoured train is meant for combat operations, and that particular one had been adapted to deal with civilians. But there were also specially devised techniques for the purpose. We saw how they worked, or rather, saw the traces they left, in Kostyukovichi Village, some thirty kilometres from Mozyr up the Pripyat River.

We were told this story by buoy-attendant **Andrei Afanasyevich Kazak**, a dark-haired man wearing a sailor's vest under his unbuttoned shirt.

"...I was a boy of eight at the time. I recall the German trucks coming to a halt just opposite from where we lived, in the centre of the village.





"The Führer ordered: 'We must develop technique of depopulation.'"

**Katerina Krot and Volga Veka
Avdotyа Yermolovich**

One of them was a covered truck with this barrel in it. Each of them went up to it and drank a mug of some liquor or other from it. There were both Germans and polizeis among them. It must've been vodka.

"They herded all the villagers together and started to drive us to the riverbank.

"We were just kids then and our mother was holding us by the hand. She said something to a polizei. He pointed his rifle at her and threatened to kill her. We all started to wail.

"Fortunately, we weren't on the list of families supposedly connected with the partisans. That's why we weren't killed. They just took us away.

"When we returned to the village some time later to dig up some potatoes or reap our rye, everything there had been burnt.

"Later, we examined the wells; that was already after the war. The Germans gassed people in special chambers on the riverbank and then brought them back and threw them down the wells. There were four such wells in the village. The gas chambers were special closed trucks where they poisoned people with gas.

"At first the Germans told the villagers they were going to bring in little orphan children to give them homes here with us in Kostyukovich.

"So when they came we thought they were bringing those children. But it was not children they brought us, but death..."

Darya Nesterovna Gusak, who was already an adult at the time, remembers things in greater detail.

All the people were driven out of the village to the bank of the Pripyat River, which carries its placid waters amid the wide green valley below Kostyukovich. The river is actually quite far off if one goes there on foot.

"We partisan families were separated from the rest on the riverbank," Darya Nesterovna begins her story. "The men and women were also separated. I had a younger sister, born in '24. My mother asked one of the polizeis: 'Dear man, take those two girls of mine away from here. We're doomed anyway.' So he led us two to where they were grouping people to be sent to Germany.

"As we walked along we saw them taking apart the wells in the village, already preparing them for people... Those gas wagons, you know, had only just arrived. They were very much like the mobile smithies we have, from the machine-and-tractor station. Only these are dark green, while the others were, how can I put it, salad-coloured. There were two of them. One of them stopped on the bank, and the other right next to the well.

"They, you know, were sitting along the riverbank, the men. They'd put them six to a row. Then one of 'em — Grisha Adamovsky it was — turned his head like this, and a German came up and hit him so hard with the butt of his gun that his head just hung down limply, and the blood spurted from his nose and mouth. He never raised his head again.

"My mother and father remained behind there for good..."

A certain Ivan Rachitsky, an evil man who showed himself a regular trimmer before the war, one who wriggled his way quite far, judging from his scope, assisted the nazis in singling out the families and those whom he considered the helpers of partisans in the crowd of Kostyukovich villagers.

"So some of us were left behind, while others were taken away," said **Darya Minovna Karas**,

a somewhat older woman. "And those who were left behind, and then killed — they were told they would be taken by motor-boat. Only they weren't taken by boat but stuffed into four wells. There were only women in this one, and only children in that one. There are another two wells with just men..."

"Then a special commission came — a Russian commission — and dug up the bodies. Only men were found in those two wells, and all stark naked! They had stripped them to the skin. A father came and recognised his son's body in one of the wells — he was lying on top — and buried him at the cemetery. They were all intact, not twisted or anything. The point is, they'd been gassed. Had they been thrown in alive they would've squirmed and writhed in the water, but they were intact, not bent in the least. They lay there just as they'd been thrown in."

The Germans did their best to cover up the traces of their brutalities in the hope that nobody in the village would see their "work". On the bank of the Pripyat River they packed up to 60 villagers into each "salad-coloured wagon" and asphyxiated them with exhaust fumes on the way back into the village.¹⁵ Near the wells the victims were stripped of their clothes in a most businesslike manner and dumped in naked. All this was done so smoothly and quietly that those who had been left by the river in the meantime and sat facing the water did not see or hear anything. Those who were spared death that day and were only temporarily driven out of their village or assigned for deportation to Germany, were no longer in Kos-

tyukovich to see what was going on. However there was one witness, the previously quoted Darya Gusak, who saw the Germans preparing the wells and noticed the "salad-coloured bus" as she was driven past under an armed escort amid a crowd of people. She did not grasp the meaning of what she saw and things became clearer to her only years later during the trial of those of the butchers who did not manage to escape or cover up their tracks. People from Kostyukovich were among those present at the trial.

The title of this chapter, "Genghis Khan Equipped with the Telegraph", is taken from the works of the Russian writer Alexander Herzen, who in the middle of the last century visualised extreme brutality as equipped no longer with mere arms, legs, sabres, and arches, but with the telegraph, steamships, railroads, Mignet guns and Congreve rockets as well.

In their annihilation of peaceful civilians the nazi Genghis Khans of all ranks used both the old, time-tested methods of their predecessors and the most up-to-date equipment. They had submachine-guns, mines, vehicles, armoured trains, airplanes, radio and a supernovelty of their own invention — *Sonderwagen* or *Gaswagen* — a mobile equivalent of the gas chambers at concentration camps.

In his *Reminiscences* Albert Speer, Minister of Munitions in the Third Reich, wrote the following after serving a twenty-year sentence handed down by the Nuremberg Tribunal:

"Hitler was the first who was able to use technology for the purposes of mass crime."¹⁶

How much suffering and horrifying cruelty can be discerned in this professional testimony!

"Selection"

1990-1991

1991-1992

1992-1993

1993-1994

1994-1995

1995-1996

1996-1997

1997-1998

1998-1999

1999-2000

2000-2001

2001-2002

2002-2003

2003-2004

2004-2005

2005-2006

2006-2007

2007-2008

2008-2009

2009-2010

2010-2011

2011-2012

2012-2013

2013-2014

2014-2015

2015-2016

2016-2017

2017-2018

2018-2019

2019-2020

2020-2021

2021-2022

2022-2023

2023-2024

2024-2025

2025-2026

2026-2027

2027-2028

2028-2029

2029-2030

As refugees poured in from the Balkan countries and the East, they were detained, robbed of their possessions, which went to the Reich, and divided into columns to be driven to concentration camps. Here they were lined up and the Germans began their picking and choosing. Some were sent right to the crematorium and the others, while they still had the strength, to work for Nazi Germany.

This procedure in places like Auschwitz and Majdanek was called "selection". The Nazis pursued the same goals in their concentration camps, those death factories, and in Byelorussian villages. Everywhere their purpose was mass annihilation of the "unneeded" population and hunting for slaves who could be made to work in Germany.

"Selection" in Byelorussia boiled down to choosing those who were to be killed, burned alive without further delay, and those who were to die somewhat later in Germany from starvation and back-breaking work. The aim was the same. What differed were the methods employed, which were adapted to the altered conditions. The victims here were surrounded by fields and bushes, by forests full of partisans, instead of barbed wire.

Stefa Petrovna Kovalenya. Osovo Village, Soligorsk District, Minsk Region.

"...It was war-time, my dears. The men tried to save their lives, but we, women, thought we'd be left alive, that it was only the men who had to try to get away. I see lots of carts approaching and says to my old man: 'You sneak off, and I'll stay with the kids.'

"So he ran away and hid. They came on, reached the village and surrounded us, cordoned us off, so there was no escape. They came for all of us. I had six children. Was lying in bed sick. Still they came and drove me out of the house. One of

my kids was a babe in arms, I was still nursing him. And all of them were just wee things. One of them is still alive, but the others were burned to death. They rounded us up, took us to the threshing-floor. I walked in and saw my hubby there — they caught him somewhere and brought him back...

"From here they herded us to Zabrodye. They had burned all the people from Zabrodye by the time we got there, we didn't see it happen. They hustled us into a shed. Then they began separating us — ordered those with children to one side and those who were single and stronger, to the other. They hustled those on and the rest of us — there was this small barn there — they herded us in there. Those who were stronger said: 'What good will it do to sit and wait till they kill us, wipe us out? Let's break down the door. They'll shoot some of us but the rest will get away.'

"The Germans must have overheard what they said, there was some interpreter there among them. They flung the door open at once and said: 'Whoever wants to work is welcome.'

"So the stronger ones walked out but how could I go with the children, my children were just wee things, and I was not too well myself.

"We spent the night there with the children. It was hardly light when they started to take us away. Ten at a time. They take them and lead them away. Where we don't know. Then we see a fire blaze up in the direction they took them. Now it's our turn. They would bring people to some place, shoot them dead and burn their bodies. So they took me and my children and my brother's wife with hers. And my dad... Just as I said... (*She breaks into long sobs.*) Each had a machine-gun... They walk along shooting. We all fell and lay there... It was as if I had fallen into some deep hole — I couldn't hear anything. They didn't set us on fire at once. I was wounded in the



"We do our duty without a pang of conscience... Later 'waves will cover the earth and there will be quiet.'"

From a letter by military police officer Jacob



**Ganna Bernikovich
Stefa Kovalenya**

leg, but didn't feel anything. Then it was as if somebody was lifting me up, lifting me out on top... But there wasn't anybody. I lifted my head. But no, they were still in the house! So I fell back down. Then they walk around for a while and one asks the other: 'Well, have we killed them all?'

"And the other says: 'Alles, all of them.'

"I kept lying there while they walked around and finally left. When they left I got to my feet, found my brother's wife and tugged at her head, tugged at it like this. 'Avdotya, Avdotya,' I called out, but she wouldn't answer. I looked round and realized they were all lying dead. What was I to do? It was frightful to just sit there till they burned me alive. But blood was running out of me. They'll catch me anyway, I thought. To make things worse there was snow all around. I managed somehow to drag myself behind the house. I went on beyond the stumps crawling on all fours. The blood wouldn't stop. They're sure to catch me, I thought. The whole village was now ablaze, Zabrodye, I mean. There I stayed in the marsh for some time; there was a little girl there with me. Her mother and all her brothers and sisters had been killed, but she was left. Ivan Gorok-

hov's daughter. We hid in a haystack, got out some of the hay and made space for ourselves. We sat there and my feet got all frozen for I'd crouched in that marsh water in just my ankle-boots. In the morning we're still sitting there and I'm not fit to go anywhere, weak as I am and with my wounded leg. Anyuta, that was the little girl's name, says to me: 'Let's go.' 'Go wherever you want to, dearie,' I says. 'I can't move. I'll die right here where I am,' I says.

"Just then I see the haystack in front of us go up in flames. And then I see them driving past. A whole string of carts. The girl cries out: 'Oh, do let's run away!'

"But I says: 'No, it's too late.'

"We sit there in that haystack like geese plucked for the soup, like we're already in the next world..."

"They had burned all the people from Zabrodye by the time we got there, we didn't see it happen," said Stefa Kovalenya. People were "selected" here, too. The Germans took the young and strong along with them. As for the rest...

During the occupation 377,776 people were transported from Byelorussia to do slave labour in Germany



Ganna Ivanovna Bernikovich saw what went on in Zabrodye. She was that very girl Anyuta who managed to escape death together with Stefa Kovalenya.

“...I was in fourth grade then. They brought us into the shed and made us kneel. Then they ordered: ‘Lie down!’

“We fell face downwards.

“I had two brothers, one was in my mother’s arms and the other, who was a little older, I sat by my side. And I also had two sisters, and they were sitting by my mother. Well then, as I lay there I heard shooting and then silence... They walked out... Well, I lay there all spattered with blood. I felt I was soaked in my mother’s blood. My head was all wet. Then one of them kept shoving my little brother away from me all the time. (*She cries.*) So I pulled him back to me by the arm... I lay quiet while they brought in some straw. As I lie there I think: ‘They’ve killed us all and the dead know everything.’ That is what I’m thinking

to myself... A dead person, but still he knows... Then I hear the straw rustling. I try to move and feel no pain. I don’t even feel any pain, I think. A person is dead and yet he knows everything. Then they set the shed on fire. I lay quiet until my arm began to get scorched. My clothes began to burn at the shoulders, and my kerchief, too. My arm got so scorched that I sprang to my feet and ran into the yard.

“I opened my eyes and looked around – the village was all ablaze. I ran around for some time thinking where should I run, what should I do. The Germans were still there – they’d kill me... I made for the shed. I look – a German. He came closer and gathered some hay. I could see him through a chink. He threw the burning hay under the eaves and it caught fire at once. I just had time to rush out before the roof came tumbling down with a crash. Finished! I ran into the forest.

“There I doused the fire on me in the snow.



Maria Zhuravskaya

There was still snow around. When I got to my feet again I saw a man coming towards me.

"He came up and asked what had happened. I told him all about it.

"'Wait for me here,' he says, 'and I'll come and fetch you in the evening.'

"How could I sit there waiting? It was getting dark already. No, I thought, I'll go away. I know where our hay is, there in the marsh. I'll hide in the haystack. So I went along. I got there and began crying. (*She breaks into tears.*) I sit there crying. A woman came later from Osov. She said she thought there were a lot of people hiding here. She was wounded in the leg. We spent the night together in the haystack. We felt like eating, we were very hungry. So I said to her: 'Come along, we have some salt pork hidden over there.' We dug up the salt pork and see — the Germans are in Krasnoye Ozero village. So we made for another haystack, someone else's. We woke up early. That woman says to me: 'Are you still asleep? Wake

up, look, the haystacks up ahead are burning.'

"I got up — they really were burning. Burning all round the marsh..."

We heard a similar story from **Maria Semyonovna Zhuravskaya** from the village of Zhilin Brod, Slutsk District, Minsk Region.

"...I lived at one end of the village and my mother at the other. I had taken my child along and gone to see my mother that day. Perhaps we spun yarn there together or did something else, I can't remember anymore. We're sitting there and hear shots. But it doesn't even enter our heads what that shooting means. And then I say: 'I'll be going home now.'

"I walked home. My old man was sawing wood in the backyard. And we start wondering what all that shooting is over there. Then we see a line of Germans crossing the field. It was too late to try to escape... Perhaps we could have run away, but

we thought to ourselves: 'We aren't guilty. Why would they shoot us or gas us?' My child wasn't with us, it had remained with my mother. They began their raid of the village and stopped at our house. I think they took away my husband, Pavel... No, I'm wrong, they took him away later.

"My younger brothers brought along my child. They were selecting young people to take to Germany at the other end of the village. So my mother said: 'Take the child to Manya, otherwise they might take her along, too.'

"I was young then, you see, a little over twenty.

"So they came to take Pavel away to Germany. His mother and I are crying and begging them not to take him away. But the German said to me... I had gone through seven years of school and could understand some German. He said that I should leave the child with my mother and go to Germany myself. That would be "gut", he said. No matter how hard we pleaded and cried they took Pavel and drove him away. I came out after them... It was a warm day, the snow was thawing. I bundled up the child and went out. I ran into a polizei. I knew him and asked: 'Fedyas, what are they scheming?' 'How would I know,' he answered.

"I went on anyway. They were driving Pavel along, and I followed behind. I asked the polizei again and he again said he didn't know a thing. He was one of our villagers, perhaps he had even courted me some time. Finally he said: 'If you want to you can drive the cows.' It was only after I asked twice that he told me this. They began herding all of us into one house, Kostik Tikhon's. I said to my husband and uncle: 'They're probably going to do something bad. Because Baranovsky told me to drive the cows...'

"It is now that people are so rich. You know what it was like in those days. Trousers were all patched. Pavel said: 'They're taking us to Ger-

many, so run and at least bring me some better trousers.'

"I ran home, our place was not far from Tikhon's, down the street. 'Don't forget to bring along some 'baccy and some food, too.'

"We agreed with his mother that the child should stay with her.

"So we dashed around getting tobacco and this and that and meantime my child stayed with my mother-in-law. I meant to rush on but a German shouted: 'Alt,' so I returned and took the baby in my arms.

"They'd already driven him away, and left me with the baby. They counted those they were taking with them and me together with them. I was standing like this near the doorway, and he snatched the baby out of my arms, this German, and handed it to another woman. It was Yas Karpovich's aunt. Then he shoved me out of the door with the words: 'You're going to Germany, things will be gut there.'

"We herded along that cattle of ours. There was a lot of snow around. And we were not walking along the road but on a sidetrack. Soon I was so tired I could barely move. But Pavel says: 'Even though you've had it, you've got to get a move on. We'll soon get to the forest.'

"When we came to the bridge we saw these tanks... Or maybe trucks coming... Then we saw some carts ... but we couldn't tell whose carts they were. Maybe Germans, maybe somebody else, the devil only knows. We went on and our men took a good look at them, there were two others walking with us... I say, in those days you didn't take ill no matter what. A person might walk two kilometres in the snow barefoot. And now the slightest little thing is enough to... Well, then we saw it was our people sitting in the cart. We went to have a look, saw the Germans were not watching, and dashed off into the forest.

"Later I returned to my mother's yard. I knew just how many people should've been there. How many burnt remains... But we looked and couldn't find nobody. We seemed to have seen father being taken away together with the horse, but where my mother was — I didn't know.

"Somebody's child was killed and burned in Kostik Tikhon's house. It could've been mine. Maybe Kostik's own children hid it under the stove or someplace else?..."

Alyona Kazimirovna Kaminskaya. Tikhon Village, Slutsk District, Minsk Region.

"...There was lots of snow and it was awful cold.

"Then this punitive expedition came to our parts. It stopped in our Tikhon village. Later they went on to Gandarevo, Krasnaya Storonka, Levishche, Podstarevo and Starevo... They burnt and killed people and took away the cattle. Took the young people away for Germany. The old people they killed. And the children.

"Well, what else did they do?

"About twelve or ten of them came to our village. Their smocks were all stained with blood. Some old women asked them: 'Where did that blood come from?' 'We chopped off geese's heads,' they said. That's just what they said.

"Well, they summoned us out into the street, drew us up in a file and pointed a machine-gun at us on one side, and a machine-gun on the other. A German officer walked down the file with a soldier and selected young people for work in Germany. Those of us who had children remained in the file. Then they ordered us to pack together a pillow, a blanket and enough food to last for three days, and placed *polizeis* by the gates, so those who were chosen for Germany couldn't go in anymore. Well, we got all those things together and brought out the food to them. They drove

them, the young ones, away to Germany and took away our cattle.

"Those ten or twelve Germans drove into Lazarev Bor. We went there later and saw the village on fire. They'd also done a lot of shooting. People there had been told that if they gave the Germans a good reception and laid a table with lots of food, they wouldn't burn down the village. So they got a table ready, all as it should be. They took away all the food, overturned the table, drove the people into the houses, set them on fire and herded off the cattle. Here, too, they picked out the young people and took them to work in Germany..."

In this way the Germans meant to turn the whole of Byelorussia into one big death camp. Only instead of barbed wire they had cordons, execution squads surrounding people on all sides; the houses, barns and sheds crammed with people were nothing other than "village crematoria". And the very procedure was not called "selection" as it was in the concentration camps, but merely a "gathering", "meeting", or "checking of passports"...

Irina Ivanovna Lopatka. Lochin Village, Osipovich District, Mogilyov Region.

"Well, then this German goes from house to house and chases people out into the street. Drives them out. Everybody down to the last soul. Well, we really... I took my daughter by the hand, and the loaf of bread was lying on the cupboard — I grabbed the loaf, tucked it under my arm and went out into the street. We thought they'd line us up and then let us go back home maybe.

"But they lined us up in rows, in three rows, and herded us into the collective-farm yard. There they again lined us up in two, no, in three files.

Every single person! They drove everyone out — from the bathhouse, the shop, the club — just everybody. Then they walked by, choosing. He'd look you in the eye and pull you out by the arm or shoulder. He'd drag you out and place you in another file.

"So I said to my daughter: 'Nalechka, run over to grandma and stay there. And I'll run off with Katya.'

"Katya was my brother's wife's name. She had three children. They were planning to take us to Pogoreloye, and there was a big forest on the way, so I says: 'We'll get away. They'll drive us through the forest and we'll get away.'

"The village was already on fire. The door in our house was open, and they brought in some straw, the Germans, piled it around, and soon the fire was shooting out of the door. Then they drove us away. But my little girl starts crying: 'I don't want to go!'

"She stood by her grandmother all in tears. A polizei went by.

"'What's the matter, little girl?'

"'I want to go to Mummy,' she said.

"'And where is your Mummy? You can go to your Mummy.'

"She ran over, I took her by the hand and they ordered: 'Forward march!'

"They set us moving. But there was this old neighbour of ours, he couldn't walk. So they beat him and beat him with a stick. There was also this old woman. They went for her with a stick, too. Well, as for us, we were ordered: 'Forward, march!'

"They forced everybody they had dragged out of the file back into the village. They drove them into one house, even the hallway was full, and into two other houses...

"When those who had been in the forest returned from the forest they were already burning.

So they took long hooks and turned the bodies to recognize them, each his own kin. Then they buried them. There is the memorial over there. There were lots and lots of them, maybe four houses full...

"As for us, at first the Germans drove us to Pogoreloye village. There were about ten families with children all in all. Then I told the girls: 'Girls, one of you has got to run away. Some of the partisans are sure to survive, so you'll at least tell them who is alive and who...'

"But they were afraid, nobody escaped. There were a few girls there with us. And nobody ran away then, nobody. Then they herded us into Budá and locked us in a barn. They separated the men and locked them in a shed. There were many men in there, and the place was tiny, it was impossible to breathe, so they lifted the ceiling. Well, as for us, we were driven into a barn and spent the night there. In the morning they ordered us out and again put us into files and again started selecting just like before. They chose seven more of our women with their children."

QUESTION: "Did they ask anything, any questions, or did they just look at you and chose?"

"He only looked and dragged you out by the arm or collar. And the rest they herded into Lapichi. There were many people who asked of their own free will. There was one woman with us there, she was already quite old, and she said:

"'Mister, I'm an old woman already, I'll never make it to Lapichi.'

"She herself asked to be put into the fire... But there were others whom they dragged out by force, the devil only knows. I don't know how they guessed..."

People didn't know which line to join. So many of them unknowingly asked to be put into the line



Once this was the thriving village of Lazarev Bor



Mother-Heroine
Maria Magolina

which was doomed to death, death in the fire. The executioners frankly enjoyed the game of hide and seek: "Well, you old hag, burn in the fire, if that's what you asked for!"

"...So they herded those into the shed and led the rest of us on to Lapichi. First they herded them into the shed and later, people said, they drove them on to Polyadky and burnt them there. Seven women and their children. There was also one older girl among them with four of her younger brothers and sisters, and she also begged the Germans herself, saying: 'Mister, I won't be able to carry him all the way.'

"One of the children was just a baby.
 "All right, move into this file then."

"So that girl with the little children was also burnt... She didn't know and herself asked for it..."

They liked having their fun while they were at their "job". They killed everyone they could, except for two seventy-year-old women, in the village of Zbyshin, Kirov District. One of them was completely blind.

"Let them live – the Soviet Union can use them to multiply." They were intoxicated with their power over the lives and deaths of people, whole families and entire villages. Miserable bolts of a huge inhuman machine mechanically performing the orders of "superiors", they could here please their souls with their power over others. They felt like "Arian Gods" who could choose their own human sacrifices to be put on the altar in front of them.

Here is another story about a different village in a different district.

"...We had been sitting in that house for maybe two hours or more. It was the last in the village. Then we saw two men coming our way. One was the interpreter and the other a tall sort of German. He limped with his right leg. He had a stick. Was holding this rubber stick... You know what I mean... They opened the door and stood in the doorway scanning us. They looked and looked, then they read out the names of the polizei families and immediately led them out. Their kin that is. And we, all the rest of us, were to die... Well, our village elders were appointed for only a week and then it was somebody else, then a third... So one of them went up to the German and started pleading: 'Let me go with my family...'

"He'd sort of worked for them. They might have let him go if it weren't for his wife, who came up and said: 'Mister, let us go, the partisans played a mean trick on us today. They took away our young boar.'

"The German said: 'So you gave your boar away to the partisans?'

"He hit her on the head with that stick of his and they took the whole family away first of all. They led them away, but where nobody knew. Then another man went up to the German: 'Set me free,' he said, 'the Kommandant in Starobin is my relative.'

"He went on explaining for a long time but they were losing their patience. They were set on killing people and he still kept on blabbering something. They also hit him on the head with a stick and took him and his family away too...

"My eldest daughter was standing there watching. I already had four children then and was heavy with a fifth. She came running up:

"'Daddy, they're taking everyone away, everyone's pleading ... but you aren't!... Please, Dad, try to ask! This house will burn and our eyes will pop out... But you aren't pleading anyone.'



"But her pa said: 'Dear, don't you see what they did to those who worked for them? What can we expect — God himself seems to have willed us to die.'

"'Come on, Daddy, go on and ask...'

"And she moved closer to the interpreter. She was still a little girl, didn't even go to school yet. The interpreter kept staring at people... And my little daughter still kept pleading: 'Daddy, go and ask...'

"Finally my husband went up and said:

"'Mister interpreter, I want to ask you something...'

"I must say, my dears, was it our fate or...

"'I do not come from these parts,' says my husband. 'I am a stranger here, work by contract, as a blacksmith. If I live at least I'll be of some use, but what good will it do you if you kill me?...'"

"The interpreter ger-gers something to the German, and he glances sharply at us and asks: 'Do you have many kinder?'

"'There they all are,' my husband says.

"'Well, blacksmith, you'll live only one extra day anyway,' he says finally.

"And my husband says: 'There's an old saying that a drawing man grasps at a straw. I wouldn't refuse to live even five extra seconds.'

"'Well then,' says the German, 'take along your wife and children and git.'

"Imagine, my dears, just recently he'd been yelling and beating people and now just see how he suddenly calmed down. Was it just our fate, or maybe one of the children was born under a lucky star?...

"But when we were walking out of the house he said:

"'They've got too many kinder. Put them in the cowshed.'

"Too many children — they were sorry to let them go..."

Maria Yefimovna Magolina from the village of Zaglinnoye, Soligorsk District, Minsk Region, who told us the story, managed the next day to outwit the Germans and save her children. They did not end their lives in the cowshed. After the war she gave birth to five more children. This still young-looking woman has been awarded the title of Mother-Heroine.

Did you note the reasoning of that German with a stick — exactly that of a proper nazi. He didn't feel sorry for the innocent children, but for the fact that this blacksmith he was going to set free had too many of them. He only wanted the man because he thought he might be able to use him, and here he had all these children! "Biological potential." No, into the cowshed, into the fire with them!

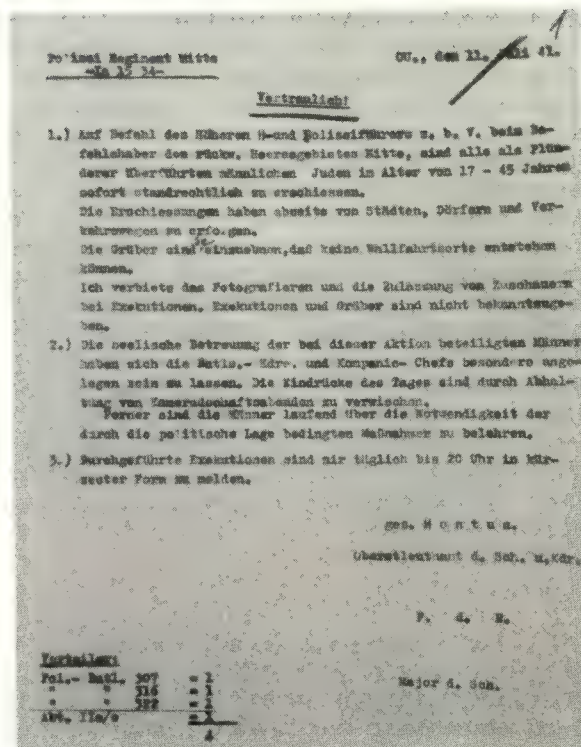
But why talk about the blacksmith when they also killed a village elder who had worked for them, killed him together with the rest of the village. The reason was the same — he had too many children!

This we learned from **Anastasya Dmitriyevna Shilo** in Razlitye Village, Borisov District, Minsk Region, who told us:

"Our headman, or village elder, the devil knows what they called him, well, he wanted to go with them. But they spat upon him, wouldn't take him along — he had too many children... That elder, Levon, was the first to be killed."

So even when the nazi "superbrutes" did have feelings, they were feelings turned inside out. But there comes the day of retribution and then...

This is what happened in Vitebsk Region. There was one such nazi here, too, who divided up the village into those the Reich might use and those



"The impressions of the day ... should be neutralized by the practice of friendly evening parties."

From an order to
the police regiment "Centre"

that were no good, that is the living and the dead. He was already driving away the "German slaves" when the line of trucks came to a halt and the shout was heard: "Partisans!" The partisans attacked from both ends. At this the "self-styled God" tumbled to the ground and lay still! He lost consciousness and plumped out of the truck. For some reason he immediately forgot that he was some kind of "super" something and that death had always been his "good friend". But, this time it was *his* death and not someone else's!

To the others the day of reckoning came somewhat later. Rosenberg, the main "selectionist", planned millions of deaths in cold blood together with the Führer – but the moment he saw the noose and his own inescapable death this "superman" fainted! All those words about "orders from above", about one's soldier's duty and one's own insignificance, also came later. But in the meantime:

"...The Germans are already entering the village. We make for home and the Germans are already prowling around the yards. I hardly had time to get home when they began driving people to a meeting. They're driving people to the meeting, asking how old they are. I had a step-mother and she said: 'She's only a little girl...'

"Anyway they chased everyone out of the house to go to that meeting. We walked over there from the village.

"There was this lad who spoke with a burr. And he's hollering and all the women are hollering, and he curses away, grabs a stone and brandishes it at them, at the polizeis. ...And one of them says:

"Such a blockhead and yet he wants to live!" And swore at him like a trooper.

"They herded us to the edge of the village and

wanted to throw us into a pit there. It was a silage pit. But then they said: 'Let's take them farther.'

"So they drove us to the river and began choosing those who could be taken to Germany and those...

"They chose a few of us and herded away the rest to kill them...

"Us, the young ones they had chosen, they herded back into the village. They were all walking around and talking. We were standing there in one of the yards. Two women had hidden there ... and one woman had two young lads. The Germans went on talking there... I still remember the sound of the word the way I heard it: 'Kom raus! Kom raus!'

"But they won't get out from under the bed, those women. The Germans start dragging them out. With the children: two women and two boys. Finally they get them out. We're standing in the yard meantime. The Germans are standing near us so we won't get away. Ah!... Then they chased those four out into the yard and all we hear is bang! and then the children screaming: a-a-a-a... Bang! a second time and more screaming. They shot four times and killed them. They killed them and drove on all the rest of us young people whom they'd left..."

The story you just read was told by **Maria Fyodorovna Verkhovodka** from Ikany Village, Borisov District.

Timofei Mikitovich Tarasevich, the narrator of the next story, comes from the same village.

"...My house stood by the cemetery grounds. They took away my wife and children and killed them there. I was away with the carts, working as a carter. When I got home they were all dead.

I wasn't around when they killed them. There were about fifteen of us manning the carts. When we returned we found this whole heap of bodies, all dead and burnt... They killed them all, didn't skip nobody. We thought there might be somebody around. So we went looking. But they were all lying there dead the way they'd burnt, their elbows pressed into the ground, their hair scorched and their heads — like cabbage, white heads of cabbage.

"They killed about seven hundred people. There were Germans who were clearing the road here that the partisans had blocked with fallen trees. They took fifty men from Goreloye for help and then killed them, too — they were on their

way home and stopped by here, and the Germans intercepted them and killed them. Those who tried to run away they killed as they were crossing the field. We found them later in the shrubs.

"They also stopped some other carters coming from Pleshchenitsy and brought them here to kill them..."

They got so much into the swing of things that they forgot about the "selection" they had meant to carry out.

And so they would have marched on over the entire globe...

Boundless Grief

By David Shields

Illustration by David Shields

Published by Boundless Grief

© 2010 Boundless Grief

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN 978-1-938922-00-0

First Edition

Second Edition

Third Edition

Fourth Edition

Fifth Edition

Sixth Edition

Seventh Edition

Eighth Edition

Ninth Edition

Tenth Edition

Eleventh Edition

Twelfth Edition

Thirteenth Edition

Fourteenth Edition

Fifteenth Edition

Sixteenth Edition

Seventeenth Edition

Eighteenth Edition

Nineteenth Edition

Twentieth Edition

Twenty-first Edition

Twenty-second Edition

Twenty-third Edition

Twenty-fourth Edition

Twenty-fifth Edition

Twenty-sixth Edition

Twenty-seventh Edition

Twenty-eighth Edition

Twenty-ninth Edition

Thirtieth Edition

Thirty-first Edition

Thirty-second Edition

Thirty-third Edition

There seemed to be no end to the rain. We were warned in the offices of the Ukhvala Collective Farm (Krupki District, Minsk Region) that we wouldn't be able to make it to Uznazh village till the earth dried up a little. Still we wouldn't give up the idea, and pinned our hopes on our experienced driver, Sasha Pekhota, who had been taking us around in a land-rover belonging to the Regional Soviet's Executive Committee for nearly two weeks now. His ingenuity and enthusiasm, so natural in the son of a Byelorussian partisan, helped him to overcome all the obstacles that came our way.

As soon as we left the gravel road and got deeper into the forest it became clear that it wasn't for nothing people had warned us against going. Hardly a kilometre down the forest road we came upon a tractor slumped to one side, its slanting funnel calling for help. It was hopelessly stuck, and a young sales girl with a ruddy complexion was guarding the tarpaulin-covered loaves it was transporting.

"Is it far to Uznazh?"

"Goodness, it's at the end of the world! You'll never get there. Better turn back while you still can!"

The rain was endless, quiet and monotonous, as in autumn. Even when the sky cleared for a short while and the sun could be seen through the ragged clouds, the drizzle didn't cease.

Skirting some barns used for threshing, we passed a large, solidly built village bearing the appropriate name of Gumny, or threshing-floors in Russian. Further on there were more forests, bogs, brushwood-roads and muddy fords. Finally we reached a huge glade that looked like a colourful patchwork rug, overgrown as it was with green timothy grass spotted in places with the rust-coloured stalks of sorrel gone to seed. Uznazh stood in this glade. It was a grey village with houses sur-

prisingly unimpressive for these parts, where there is an abundance of building materials right at hand. It may be because of the rain, but Uznazh seemed very much unlike all the other reborn villages, where people usually build on a grand scale, thus asserting their hold on life. No greenery had been planted here, and the street seemed disproportionately wide and empty.

In the third yard down the street we heard agitated voices: **Pyotra Vladimirovich Sakovets**, the man we had come to see, was adjusting a television antenna. Two young fellows dressed in waterproof jackets were helping him. We asked Pyotra Vladimirovich to give us a little of his time.

"...It happened in 'forty-two. In the fall. We were already digging potatoes..."

"Well, I had been in Lozhki grazing cattle. I came home. Partisans started driving through the village shouting: 'Run for your lives, the Germans are coming!' I ran back there, to the village, to Lozhki..."

Pyotra Sakovets told us about the many times they escaped. It turned out that misfortune didn't strike that time. The men fled from Uznazh many times on signals from the partisans or after the villagers themselves raised the alarm. They ran away to the neighbouring village, hidden deeper in the forest. All those scares and escapes became one mixed-up whole in the memory of the narrator, then only a little shepherd boy. "That time" differed from the rest only on account of the enemy's deceit. Deceit is something people are particularly apt to remember.

"They didn't gather all the people then," the narrator recalls. "They said, the Germans did: 'Whoever we find in the forest we shall shoot immediately, but those who stay home we shan't.' So

the women went and brought back their men. Then they swooped back down on us in the night. They locked them in a shed and began shooting them. Well..."

"Well..." We often heard this interjection from both men and women who failed to find human words to convey their hair-raising experience.

Ganna Yefimovna, Pyotra's wife, comes from that very village of Lozhki where the shepherd boy ran to hide. She is one of those village women whose healthy beauty is not destroyed by age and misfortunes. The wrinkles lining her face in its frame of thick fair hair only make it all the more expressive. She is much older than her husband but looks younger. The events of that day are more alive in her memory and her story is more animated, but she, too, is far from talkative.

"...On that day when the Germans surrounded Uznazh, we had gone to that bog over there, to its very end, where the cranberries grew. There were three of us, two girls and an older woman. We were from Lozhki, quite another village.

"Soon we heard the Germans babbling something on the shore. They were combing the forest. There were dug-outs in the forest, right there by the bog's end. People from Uznazh hid there with their children. This guy, too... (*She points at her husband.*) His pa had nine children and he brought them all to their dug-out. When we heard those Germans babbling we ran home as fast as our legs could carry us. Hardly had we got there, when... We ran about a kilometre through the bog. And those kids came trailing along behind us, running. Pyotra here, Ganna and another girl... They say: 'The Germans have surrounded Uznazh and we don't know what they... They'll start killing people...'

"It was around five, almost evening. We spent the night there in Lozhki and early in the morning heard someone screaming there and the cows mooing. It was this woman, Makarikha, she was screaming something... Well, what could it mean? Somebody had to crawl over there and listen. The older men from Lozhki crawled across the bog and through the thickets. They listened and then said: 'They're shooting!'

"We heard screaming and crying there — it was a real madhouse. We waited in hiding all that day, all day and all night. Everything was quiet again. Somebody had to go and see what was going on. The men went and had a look. All was quiet except for the flocks of black rooks flying around cawing... There was not a soul around. Only cows. A few cows..."

"Well then... Those boys there ran to have a look: there was nobody left, they had all gone away. Bodies were lying about... A partisan was killed, he was lying near the dug-out they said.

"Then they went over to that grave. There was a collective-farm threshing barn there. They locked them in... Led them to that pit... Led them to that pit and stripped them naked, poor things!... Their sheepskin coats were lying right there. Whatever each of them was wearing lay there. They ordered them to lie down in the pit and killed them. Just sprinkled a little earth on top..."

"My brother was there in person, he went to have a look. And he said: 'There was not more than a couple of centimetres of earth on top of them. That earth was still moving...'

"It was only on the next day that they went. Didn't find nobody. Only the cats mewing and a few cows wandering around.

"Then a few days later... They set fire to the whole village. It all burnt down... But his house (*she points at her husband*), his pa's house, wasn't

burnt. His pa's brother was in Nemanitsa, he heard about what happened and came here before they burnt the village. He said: 'Let's take this chap's house apart. At least the logs might be left for somebody to use them...'

"So they took apart the house and those logs lay around until this lad — he was still little then — grew up and (*she laughs*) we got married. In nineteen fifty we built a house out of those half-rotten logs and slapped on a slightly newer porch, and here we are. But now we are building us a new house."

QUESTION: "How many people did the Germans kill here?"

"Three hundred and sixty. There were... What lads, my, what lads! And girls!... I cried my eyes out... The lads there were here! Our fellows... And this one here (*she points at her husband*) — eight years my junior. Well, that's all right. We make do. Our life isn't so good anymore, but we get along well..."

Here in Uznazh the nazis tried to create the impression that they were killing only those who were connected with the partisans. It turned out that everybody was "connected" and naturally the men more than anybody else.

Witnesses have remained in the village of Ukhvala who saw how another such impressive division into those who were "connected" and those who weren't was realized.

Maria Victorovna Lukashevich manages the cafeteria at the local turf factory; she told us that the nazis also interrogated her, only a girl then, thinking she acted as a messenger for the partisans. Then they drove all the Ukhvala people out into the wasteland beyond the village and made

them run to and fro in single file to make a path for themselves, clear the road of partisan mines. There was no explosion.

Then they ordered them all to squat down and beat up an old man who couldn't do so anymore. After that they began picking out "the guilty", "the connected".

"My cousin's husband was a Communist," said Maria Victorovna, "and not even her husband, but his brother; he himself wasn't but they grabbed him and led him away anyway. They also had a son Vitya, a lad of eleven. His grandad and granny said: 'Come over to us.' But his father said: 'No, he should be at my side wherever I am.'"

"So they took people like that, loads of innocent people, and told them to stand on the left.

"The rest of us they told to go away.

"As we were leaving they all shouted: 'Farewell! Farewell!'

"Well, we all walked home like lunatics...

"...There were a hundred and fifty people there. The pit was very deep — it was an old dried-up well..."

The midsummer sun was shining brightly over Mstizh, its generous rays bouncing off the white-washed walls and fences, and the blue and yellow shutters that looked like the wings of some fairy-tale butterflies.

Mstizh is a collective name for two villages, Mstizh and Mstizh-Voloki, in Borisov District, Minsk Region, which have merged into a bigger settlement.

On an elevation at a fork in the road, near the building of the local village Soviet stands a memorial on the common grave of the Mstizh men shot in October 1942.

We first heard about what happened here from

Interviewing people in Mstizh



Alexander Felixovich Lisichonok. On that frightful day he managed to escape to the forest before the shooting began. The old man's memory is no longer very sharp, but it is fading in the same way as an old oak withers — wisely and logically. The smaller twigs dry up and break off while the trunk becomes even harder.

"This is what happened here... A partisan detachment was on its way from behind the front. And it stationed in our village for the night. That was Saturday evening. Two partisan women stayed the night at my place. They asked the mistress of the house to prepare them something to eat. 'We're leaving tomorrow at seven in the morning,' they said. But they were still there the next day, way after noontime.

"One of my sons was with the partisans and so was my son-in-law. My brother lived at the other end of the village. It was in his house that those partisans joined the detachment and took the oath. Both local villagers and strangers. It was at lunchtime that they did it. As soon as they were gone the Germans attacked Mstizh.

"Another of my sons, he was only thirteen then... He now works as a tractor operator. He later told me that the Germans had herded all the men together and ordered them to sit in the street without so much as moving a finger. So they sat there. One of them had a little child with him and he started to do something with the child there, you know, and they killed him at once. Just for moving. The child they left alone...

"Well, later on they herded all the men where our store used to be, where our service shop now is, you know, the tailor's and the shoemaker's. They crammed the shop with all those people, still alive they were then... Those who couldn't fit in, they took to the village Soviet, where the me-

morial now stands...

"They drove all the rest of the men into a shed there.

"There was a bakery nearby, and they took the men out of the store one by one and shot them there, in the basement.

"The rest they burned alive..."

We later listened to eye-witness accounts of this tragedy by the Mstizh women. These were profoundly emotional recollections, at times resembling keening. These middle-aged and elderly women gathered on a bench by one of the houses, as if they had come to a wake or funeral party, to relive the events of that dreadful day together...

Yadviga Yakovlevna Glot began the story.

"Early Sunday morning we collected some bread for the partisans. Then I had breakfast and went off to the field with my elder daughter. We went to spread out the hemp to dry. As we were spreading it we saw two partisans coming our way. They were heading for the village... Then my daughter said: 'Mother, look, why are they all running so?'

"I looked up and saw people running across the vegetable gardens, and skirting the threshing-floor. All the villagers...

"'Goodness, dear, the Germans must already be in the village!' I said.

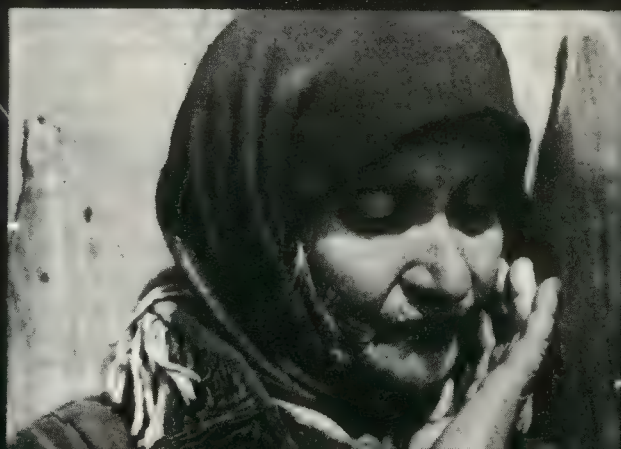
"We forgot all about our hemp and ran.

"We ran. Our dog followed me. We're running and a line of Germans is advancing over there, nearby. And people are already falling to the ground. They're killing people already. I says: 'Dearie, they're sure to kill us!'

"Three of my children had stayed home. A boy and two girls.



Barbara Barbukha
Katerina Glot
Yadviga Glot



"They'll kill the children and us, too! Luckily they didn't... Just shot my dog next to us.

"I says: 'They've killed the dog, and now they'll kill us.'

"But no, they let us pass — right here, near the threshing floor. I lived at the other end of the village, that's where my house was, where the vegetable garden is now. I run into the yard and my children are crouching under the fence. Then I ask: 'Where's your dad?'

"When I left the house in the morning my brother and my husband's sister were there with him.

"'They ran into the forest,' they say. My children say that.

"I walked into the house and sat there with my children. A German comes in. Pointed his tommy-gun at me.

"'Where's your husband?' he asks.

"'Where you guys are,' I says, 'just where you are.'

"That's what I told him. And he asks:

"'How come the boy's only a year old then? (He was only a baby.) Why is the kinder so small?'

"'Do I need a husband to have a child?' I says.

"'Oh, some woman you are!' he says.

"Well, then he walked into the house. Walked around and around and then said: 'Get water!'

"But I thought he said: 'Get outa here.' So I grab hold of my children and I walk out. But he says:

"'No, bring me some water to wash my hands.'

"Well, then I brought him a basinful of water and hung him a towel. He washed his hands. Then he led me behind the partition, to the other half of the room, and told me to make the bed. The devil take him! What else?... It turned out they were bringing a wounded German into the house. And this one must have been a doctor. Because it was he who did the bandaging. Bandaged up that other German. I made the bed for him

then. Actually, he told me to take off all the clean bedding and the bedspread, too. So I left only the sheet. They placed the German on the bed and bandaged him up. Then they put him on a stretcher and carried him out again...

"Well, I see Andreyev's barn is already ablaze. So I started taking things out of the house. Brought them out into the garden.

"Then they wouldn't let me into the house to get the children. I begged them, saying I had small children in the house. Finally, they let me go. I took those three children and went out into the street.

"Well, then they placed all the men in one file and the women in another. They drove the men on in front and we came behind. Some had managed to hide but we...

"They drove the men in one direction but us they locked up in the store. We stayed locked up in there from Sunday to Wednesday. Early Wednesday morning an airplane landed in the village and they released us all.

"Well, we went home. But by the time we came everyone was killed and everything burnt down."

QUESTION: "What did you see when you came out?"

"Oh me, oh my! After we were let out we rushed on, stumbling over one another in our haste. Didn't even know where to run. You see, we were locked up from Sunday to Wednesday without anything to drink or eat. And there were little children with us. I don't remember whether my baby was a year old then, or less. He now lives in the town of Pinsk, my son."

QUESTION: "Then you went to that place where they killed the men?"

"Yes, we dragged out the bodies. Whoever recognized one of his family would get him out. We dragged out our brother though there was not

much left of him – just from the waist to the knees...”

The men were killed, breadwinners, fathers, brothers, husbands and sons...

Katerina Glot and Barbara Barbukha joined in the conversation and added more details. The first was reserved and sober-minded, the second, a quiet and pensive woman, who had sat there for a long time as if not hearing anything, her head bent low and resting on her palms. Now they both spoke almost simultaneously, complementing each other, telling us what happened to the men that day.

“We didn’t even see how they drove them in,” said **Katerina Osipovna Glot**... “Us they locked up on Sunday and on Monday a German walked in with an interpreter and the interpreter asked: ‘Which families have partisans among them?’

“Well, nobody says anything.

“‘We will let whoever tells us go home. She won’t have to sit here and she’ll be left alive.’

“Who would be a traitor, you say?...

“Why not? Manika Avdotyina and another woman went to show them those partisan families. First of all they made for my sister’s yard.

“‘Here,’ they said, her husband and three sons are with the partisans...”

“Well, what then? There was a real blood bath... She was all beaten up. After that they brought her to us and brought a partisan woman with her, also all beaten up. They shoved my sister so hard that she fell to the ground. Then she came up to me and said: ‘Don’t admit you are my sister, otherwise they’ll kill us both.’

“Well, so she sat in one corner like this, while I sat huddled up with the children in another...

The partisan woman sat by her side... They didn’t kill her or that other woman but released us all. Well, she went home and only lived two or three months after that and then died. They beat her up so bad...”

“They would surely have burnt us all,” said **Barbara Semyonovna Barbukha**, “but they let us go after that plane came. It came on Wednesday and landed right near the store, where the foodstore is. It was a German plane. Two men climbed out and came over. They came and one of them started to talk. He spoke, the German, and the interpreter said after him:

“‘You should be grateful to this chief: he’s setting you free. If it weren’t for him, you would have been dead today.’

“There was this old woman, very old she was, this woman’s mother-in-law (*she points to someone*), and when he said to say thank you she fell on her knees in front of him. Must have wanted to kiss his hand or something, God knows what entered her mind... We were barely alive by that time... But he... he was holding this stick in his hand and he hit that old woman with the stick. That liberator. After that she, that old woman, could hardly get to her feet... And people started running over her. God, oh God!...”

Marta Vasilyevna Lashkevich, an old woman of nearly eighty, recalled the last hour of her husband’s life.

“He went to have a look at the horses and took our little boy along. That son of ours is no longer alive... His pa said: ‘You’re much too small and I’m much too old: I’m sure they won’t do any-

Mikolai and Anastasya Golotseвич



thing to us. Let's go and bring in the horse.'

"But by that time they had surrounded the village. So he said to the boy: 'No, sonny, it looks like we won't get through. See, they've already surrounded us.'

"The boy was only a little bigger than that girl here.

"Let's go back home,' his pa said.

"Then they went over to one of the neighbours and my husband said: 'It looks like we're finished now. We're surrounded on all sides...'

"That very minute a German walks in and says: 'Get out!'

"To those men. There were maybe three men in the house. They chased those men out into the street. When they'd lined them up in the street he, my husband, said to the boy: 'Sonny, you go back to the house. They're going to kill me,' he says.

"So the boy ran way off, beyond the village. Later he came back and ended up in that store, with us. There were five children in there and that sister-in-law of mine, too. And then they let us out.

"But my husband died in the fire. Some of them the Germans killed and the rest they burnt alive..."

In the places we visited we came across very few villages where the nazis killed *only* the men. In most cases they first did away with the men and then with the rest of the villagers. But, of course, there were "variations" in the routine...

Anastasya Zmitrovna and Mikolai Fedosovich Golotseвич live in Osovo Village, Klichev District, Mogilyov Region. He is a quiet, hard-working tailor and she – an efficient and energetic housewife. It was from them that we first heard about the tragic events in their native village of Lyutin, which they left for Osovo after the war. The man spoke as men usually do – in a restrained, unemotional manner. Then his wife took the initiative. The two seem to get along very well and don't make a problem out of who should



...speak and who should listen. They think very much alike and whoever is the first to express his thoughts speaks out.

We offer the reader this family story just as we recorded it: the husband and wife speaking in turn.

"...Well then, they came and surrounded the village," the husband began. "They walked into every house and at once set it on fire..."

His wife interrupted:

"They drove everybody out into the pasture. Those who were able took everything they could out of their house, and those who didn't, didn't.

"So we sit there in the pasture and watch. They tried to look like dandies, priding in their uniforms. They looked themselves over all the time like this... When they speak we can't understand what they're saying. If a German speaks you can tell it's a German. But these can't speak either German or Russian properly.

"Well, so we sit there wondering what they're

going to do with us. They surrounded us and placed machine-guns around us at all four corners like this. We go on sitting there. Then they said:

"The women and the twelve-year-old children are to go home. Go home and bring over your pigs and cows and chickens and geese. Then we will set your men free."

"They start 'vacuating the men into the school building. So we went home.

"Him. (*She points at her husband.*) they took to that school.

"Of course, whatever cattle we had we rounded up and drove with us hoping they would release our men. Our cow tried to run away. But we were frightfully scared and didn't let her go off into the forest. We brought her right to where the school was. We thought if we brought the cow they'd let my husband go.

"But even so they didn't let him go. But he himself managed to get away somehow, made his escape among the cows.

"We sit home waiting to see what they're going

to do. One of the Germans comes in and says:

"Take down that clock of yours!"

"We took it down. No, he didn't speak, just pointed. There was also children's mattress lying there on the floor. He pointed at it: 'Take that out, too!' So we took it, too, and dragged it out into the yard. When we were carrying them out, we wrecked the pendulum and everything in there.

"Several policemen came up, turned and twisted it, the clock, and then dumped it. Didn't take it.

"Well, we're sitting there in the yard, thinking: 'Will they release our men or not?' Meantime they set fire to the houses in the village.

"Then a German comes up and walks into our house. We had three tables in the house, and he piled those three tables one on top of the other, poured something on them and set them on fire. Then he went out into the yard, and shot at the house with these bullets on both sides, setting it on fire. The house is all ablaze. My elder son, Yavgen — he now lives in Bobruisk — and I started to bring in pails of water but they began shooting at us and wounded the lad. He fell. Well, then I stopped bringing in water...

"They herded the men into the school. Well, they didn't even shoot them there, just set the school on fire; they all burnt up in the school. Those who tried to escape through the windows they shot down. The school was about half a kilometre away from our house..."

Her husband continued:

"Well, they herded us together and then sent the women back home. They herded us together, surrounded us, and we're standing there, they'd locked us up... Those who were younger they let out into the yard — they needed someone to herd the cows. That's what they picked us younger folk for. We went up to the carter and asked: 'What are they going to do to us?'

"They said: 'How would we know. Start herding the cattle and then run off into the forest.'

"So we drove the cows up to the forest and started to run, and they started to shoot at us with their tommy-guns. But there were all those cows in the way... And we bent low and ran. The forest was quite near..."

QUESTION: "Did you, women, go to that place afterwards?"

The wife:

"Of course we did. I thought: maybe he's burning somewhere. I didn't know, see. He might have run away or might be burning somewhere.

"Well then, I dragged out some of the men. Some of them are burning as they lie there, and I grab hold of them, throw aside what is left of the clothes and drag them out so the body won't burn to ashes. So we can at least bury them.

"Not one of them was left alive, all seventy-six people were burnt to death..."

In Lyutin the women gathered in the house of Maria Alexandrovna Pashkevich, a pensioned schoolteacher. At first her neighbours were guided merely by the curiosity so natural in a small village: they wanted to know who these guests were that had come by car to call on the old teacher. They stepped over the threshold with smiles, greetings and jokes, but as soon as they learned the purpose of our visit, their faces darkened and they remained in the house for a long time.

Maria Ananich, Volga Maximchik and Alexandra Tarelka, all of them middle-aged women, were among those who dropped by. Then came eighty-year-old Volga Yevmenovna Golotseviv with a bunch of medicinal herbs in her calloused old hands. It was St. John's Day, that age-old holiday of the Sun, of life's blossoming, of flowers and happiness...

The mistress of the house was the first to unburden her sorrow, followed, one after the other, by her neighbours. In the end they all spoke in chorus, like some fearsome group of female keeners mourning their menfolk – their fathers, husbands and brothers.

Maria Alexandrovna Pashkevich

"I began working here before the war. I had an apartment in the village which was paid for by the village Soviet. I have three children: a son who was born in 'twenty-seven (he is going on pension from the Army this year), and two daughters, one born in 'twenty-eight and the other in 'thirty-seven. I was left a widow in 1937. My husband had... a gastric ulcer. They operated on him twice in Rogachev, but still, he died. I was left to bring up the children all by myself. I moved to Lyutin.

"We heard the Germans were burning down villages – Orliny, some five kilometres away, and another one, beyond the river. The school principal says:

"‘I think I’ll go away to live with my mother.’

"‘Well, there’s nowhere I can go,’ I say.

"So I live in the school all alone. Not another soul in the entire school – and such an enormous hallway! And the classrooms were like that... But I can’t say I was afraid. I really felt no fear. But each time I walked into the village I would hear: they burned this, they burned that...

"It happened in the beginning of April, I think, in 1942. The children were still asleep. I woke up and looked out the window and saw things lying around in the vegetable gardens. People’s belongings. Well, what belongings did people have in those days?! It’s now, you know, that they’ve be-

come well-off, but then... what kind of things did they have? Some old trunks and that’s all. Well... So I said to the children:

"‘There’s something wrong in the village, children.’

"You know, hardly had I said that when I heard somebody coming down the hallway: thump-thump-thump. Germans coming! Walked straight into my classroom.

"‘Woman, zurück!’

"And I was, beg your pardon, not even dressed yet. The children weren’t dressed either.

"‘Woman, zurück!’

"Well, it was the enemy... I had to obey. I saw them running about the village herding all the people together. They herded all the men together and all the women. Like this, I mean: they placed the men on one side and the women on the other.

"One of the nazis comes out, a young man. I was with all the rest of the women. Didn’t take anything along – only threw a coat over my nightgown. And the children, too, had nothing but their coats on. Didn’t have time to put on their clothes or anything. The children say to me:

"‘Mom, this is the end of us!’

"So this blond young nazi walks between the lines speaking very good Russian. He says:

"‘Because, you know, the partisans have been visiting you far too often...’ and he gulps down a glass of vodka, ‘we, you know, will have to burn down your village.’

"Well, all the men and the women stand there listening.

"‘Well,’ he goes on, ‘here are our conditions: bring over your cows, sheeps’ – that’s just how he says it – ‘your cows, sheeps and pigs, you know...’

"The school was fenced in, see.

"‘If you bring them here, we’ll set the men free. Understand?’



Lyutin women (left to right):

Maria Ananich

Volga Maximchik

Alexandra Tarelka

Volga Golotseвич



Village teacher Maria Pashkevich





Maria Pashkevich with Lyutin schoolchildren

"Well, everyone treasures his life. The men remained there while the women dashed off, ran into the village and brought their 'cows, sheep and pigs' – everything, right here, into the school yard. The Germans placed sentries and herded all those men, seventy-six men of all ages – both middle aged and quite old men... It was the seventh grade classroom, right in there. And locked them in.

"Then they told the women: 'Get out of here.'

"Then – they had this special punitive unit or execution squad it was called – and they ran around the place and set each little ... each cottage on fire.

"I had no place to go. I stayed there, by the school, some five metres away, near a shed. I sat down by the shed with my three children around me – I had no place to go. I hadn't even taken any of my belongings with me. Then my daughter, who was born in 'twenty-eight, said:

"'Mummy, I'll run and fetch some of our things.'

"'Don't do that,' I said, 'They'll think we're connected with the partisans.'

"Because they kept asking all the time: 'Why are you living alone? Where is your husband?'

"But my daughter said: 'Mother, I'll go and at least grab one of the pillows.'

"She took three little pillows and dashed out. We all went on sitting there.

"Well, three Germans started to put the school on fire at each corner. They were in such a hurry! And inside there were all those people, human beings, living human beings!... Indeed, in the whole of history nobody ever heard of such bestiality. Those people were squealing unbearably. The screaming was unbearable.

"Everything around was ablaze by now. One of them passes by and says: 'Gut!'

"That means 'good' in German. No, he isn't

speaking to me, they're talking among themselves. The whole village is completely on fire. And I'm sitting there with the children. It was morning, perhaps ten or eleven o'clock. And it had snowed a little.

"'Gut, gut!...'

"People are burning, people are screaming. It was simply unbearable, dreadful!...

"And I continue to sit there... My head and ears seem ready to burst... Then I see a nazi riding up to me on a beautiful, tall horse, but without a saddle. The children!... The boy was very thin and bony, there was something wrong with his lungs:

"'Mother,' he says, 'we're finished now.'

"But the German took one of those pillows without saying a word, turned round and rode away. My children were pleased as punch. As soon as he'd ridden away, another, you know, rode up... Another one! There was another pillow lying there, you know. He also took it and rode off. They didn't so much as say a word to me...

"And those people are still screaming!...

"They took the cattle and drove it to Yelizovo. There were all sorts of people in the village, some of them were quite old and weak, and they shot them on the way. There were many of them lying about in the village.

"Well, they left. People started to come over from the village.

"'What are you going to do, Alexandrovna?' they asked.

"My head was still bursting, you know, from the horror of it all...

"Later I said to my son:

"'Son, the toilets were left. Take off the doors, cover up, excuse me, those holes and we'll live there.'

"So we started living in those toilets. We stayed there one day... There was nothing to eat and the

wells were all poisoned. My daughter didn't even ask for food, you know. The rest of the folk went to their relatives in the neighbouring villages, but I had no place to go. So I stayed there. We spent the night there. The next day some little girls came over, second and third graders. The daughters of the director of the peat factory. Somebody had told them: 'Maria Alexandrovna must be losing her reason, living there in the toilet. She is either completely unhinged or something.' The director's wife, you know, comes and says:

"'Maria Alexandrovna, how long are you going to sit here?'"

"She invited me to her place, the peat factory was not destroyed then, and gave me shelter and food."

"In my head and ears there was still this terrible ringing, just unbearable... But I was alive... still a living being, and felt hunger. I'll tell you quite frankly – I went begging in the villages. They knew me wherever I went... (*She breaks into tears.*) People took pity on me..."

Maria Trofimovna Ananich

"...I had a son of ten. I said to him:

"'They're going to herd us together and kill us, my lad.'"

"Well, they began herding us together. A German came and I started to carry my weaving loom into the house. It was a pity to leave it, so I picked it up. But he points his revolver at my breast and says:

"'Leave it alone!'"

"So I left it. He grabbed me by the scruff of the neck and chased me out into the pasture. Held me by the scruff of my neck all the way to show where I should go. My child was holding on to me. My mother and father also came to the pasture and we

all stood there together. And that village was already on fire.

"Well, so we're all standing in the pasture. Then... There was this young woman among us, she went up to a policeman or German but he hit her on the head with his stick.

"This Danila who lived on the outskirts of the village was standing there with us and said:

"'They are going to kill us all, men and women alike, 'cause they've grown fat with it. They'll kill us here in the pasture.'"

"We all burst into tears, all the women and children..."

"Our whole family is standing there together: ma and pa and me and my son. Then the policemen point:

"'Go to the school, to the school! And the women, go home!' they say. 'Go fetch your cows and any other cattle you have and we'll play around with your men a bit and then send them home.'"

"I say: 'Mummy, bring them your cow and I'll bring mine. Maybe they'll let daddy go then.'"

"I went back to my house and she to hers. Well, then all this shooting began. Everybody said: 'They're going to kill the men!' My mother came running and screaming away: 'They've burned father!...'"

Volga Stepanovna Maximchik

"It was cold, very cold. They drove us to the pasture. The men to the right and the women to the left. Some of our men there had fought back in the other war – they understood German. The interpreter said they were going to burn all the men if we didn't bring all we had there.

"Well, what could we do? We caught whatever livestock we had — all the geese and chickens. Although we didn't have a father we hoped to at least survive ourselves. So we brought our animals over. The only thing we didn't bring was our pig, our sow with young. A German came and pointed his pistol at us: 'Drive that sow!'

"One of the men said: 'Let me drive your cows.'

"But we didn't let him: we thought they'd shoot us then. We thought they'd shoot us in the cemetery. We collected our cows and drove them there. Took our chickens, too... The policemen cut the chickens' heads off and threw them all on a cart...

"There was a beautiful girl in the village, and a German seized her — wanted to take her there, to the school, where they burnt the men. But another German didn't let him.

"Then they set the school on fire, too...

"They burned down all the houses. Only the fences were left...

"Later we went there — there was nothing but bones. We guessed or recognized whose leg it was... We dug out the remains a week later — each tried to find his relatives...

"That's how we were left alive..."

Alexandra Antonovna Tarelka

"It was on the fifth, Easter day. The partisans gave word that the Germans were burning the neighbouring village of Stolyari. They came running in the night: 'Run for your lives. They will burn down Lyutin.'

"We all took everything out of our houses and went to the cemetery.

"There's no sign of the Germans,' people said.

"We'll stroll around here, after all it's Easter!...

"Then a partisan came riding from Stolyari. Yakov Bogdanovich was his name. 'Run off,' he said. 'They're already on their way, they're crossing the river, those Germans and police.'

"We could already hear shooting — like somebody breaking sticks. We ran. From a distance we saw Lyutin all ablaze.

"Women came running from there later, saying: 'They burnt the village!'

"We're all in a panic, crying: 'What are we to do?'

"Then we went and dug them all out. We found part of a leg to the knee — it lay there so nice and white — we all stared at it. One of the women recognized it by the underwear:

"'I wove that,' she says. 'That's my old man's leg,' she says.

"He was a team leader on the collective farm. Prokop Ananich was his name.

"That,' she says, 'is my husband's leg...'"

Volga Yevmenovna Golotsevich

"...And they said: 'Get together all your livestock and bring it to the school.'

"They put my old man in the column with the rest and herded them to the pasture. So he went... Went without a hat or anything though it was cold then. A German followed him.

"My son's wife had a little baby and they even took the cradle to the pasture...

"They put the men in the school and left me to take care of a cart. So I stand there holding the reins. They placed a machine-gun near me. And I'm holding the horse. The moment somebody jumped out of the window they would machine-gun him. The person would fall dead. They killed several men that way...

"I keep holding the horse. Then he turned the machine-gun this way and I let the reins go..."

"Well, later on when they had already burnt everyone and the village was all burnt, all burnt to ashes — no-thing was left — well then, they gave me that same cart and said: 'Drive to the factory!'

"They placed the machine-gun on the cart and a German went with me.

"We drove off. I was barely alive. Only my teeth kept chattering. I thought: 'This is the end of me...'

"We came to the bridge. He took the horse and began shooting over my head, and I was so scared I couldn't remember which way to go. Well, I went all the same, walked on and on and finally came here to the cemetery.

"I came... Well, what can I do here? I spent the night there. I wasn't even scared. I didn't even feel anything more — neither the cold nor the hunger... And so I just stayed there.

"The next morning we woke up — there wasn't anyone or anything around anywhere, everything was finished.

"And so we remained with our grief, wandering in fields and forests and everywhere. Without clothes, without food, without shoes, without anything..."

The old woman, her hands on her knees, still holding the herbs, fell silent. But the younger women felt more at ease now and talked on.

We could hardly keep up with them, make out what they were saying, jot down who was speaking. We have transcribed the rest of their conversation just the way it was, all jumbled up, with

them speaking in turn or all together, interrupting one another:

"...They attacked us very, very many times!

"They again came and encircled the whole village. Whatever men there were, in their dug-outs or any place, they picked up, every single one, and chased them to the factory again. That was such a calamity, nobody had ever known such a calamity!..."

"Next time they killed a young lad here and three men, all that was after they burned people in the school..."

"It was a terrible attack they made on Lyutin. You know: the forest all around and the factory. They set on from all sides — from Birkovo, from the factory — all on Lyutin! There was no place to run. Whatever leftovers you had in the house, whatever old rye cake or potato pancake you found, or if you baked something — they would grab it..."

"Where could we do our cooking? Over fires in the yard. Those were evil days indeed!..."

"They attacked us from everywhere! From everywhere — from the factory, from Zapolye, from Birkovo — from everywhere! And they all made for Lyutin, for Lyutin! It was a terrible calamity..."

"The first days, when we were making those dug-outs, we built bonfires. Stepan would come out and say: 'Get up, everybody! The factory has already started work!'

"Well, that was a joke, of course. Well, what else was there to do? We had nothing to eat. Whoever found some sorrel or acorns — we'd gather everything and eat it. We were barefoot and oh!..."

Children holding bunches of flowers came into the old teacher's house. We walked together with the women and children to the common grave on the site of the former schoolhouse where the Lyutin children had studied before the war and where their fathers later met an awful death in the flames...

The birches stood quietly over the grave. The children, too, fell silent.

It was somewhere here that the teacher sat with her children, as, almost beside herself with horror, she watched the awful fire and heard the screams of mortal agony...

It was somewhere here that nazi murderer walked to and fro with his tommy-gun, warming himself by the fire as he repeated in businesslike tones:

"Gut, gut!..."

New Children

by David Shields

Illustrated by David Shields

Published by Scholastic Inc.

Copyright © 1999 by Scholastic Inc.

All rights reserved.

Printed in the United States of America.

ISBN 0-439-01111-1

0-439-01111-1

0-439-01111-1

0-439-01111-1

0-439-01111-1

0-439-01111-1

0-439-01111-1

0-439-01111-1

0-439-01111-1

0-439-01111-1

0-439-01111-1

0-439-01111-1

0-439-01111-1

0-439-01111-1

0-439-01111-1

0-439-01111-1

0-439-01111-1

0-439-01111-1

0-439-01111-1

0-439-01111-1

0-439-01111-1

0-439-01111-1

0-439-01111-1

0-439-01111-1

0-439-01111-1

0-439-01111-1

0-439-01111-1

0-439-01111-1

0-439-01111-1

0-439-01111-1

0-439-01111-1

0-439-01111-1

0-439-01111-1

"I was in another group of people. How they started to cry! In all kinds of voices, like bees, they just mowed them down!... When they were shooting I managed to bend over, and a bullet skimmed me... Clipped off a tress of my hair and tore off my kerchief. And my blood is streaming. I'm lying there alive, and the baby is alive. And I'm pressing its face down, and it's bawling. I feel I'm smothering it, my heart aches. Both I and the baby are alive... I loosen my hold, it starts bawling. They were walking by with their pistols and finishing off those who were still alive. He came up and heard my child screaming. He fired at the child and shot through my fingers. The child fell silent and I felt his blood spurting onto my face..."

(From the recollections of **Maria Grigoryevna Kulak**, Boroviki village, Slonim District, Grodno Region.)

They fired into the crowd, aiming at people's chests and heads. Those of the children who weren't in their parents' arms clutched to their legs and knees. Children are smaller and they were shielded by the adults. Those who fell, alive, into the heaps of dead bodies were mostly children. How many of them were then buried alive, dumped into wells or thrown into fires — alive!

"A man came from the village and said:

"'Whoever is alive, get up. The Germans have gone!'

"My father recognized his voice, raised to his feet and said:

"'Well, I'm alive.'

"And he began examining the bodies.

"'All my children are here, just one of my daughters, a girl of six, is gone. She couldn't have run away, she is too small for that.'

"He began looking again and then I responded. My feet were injured by the fallen bodies, all my bones..."

(From the recollections of **Yevgenia Adamovna Bardun**, Niz Village, Slonim District, Minsk Region.)

"Here" meant gone, dead. That is how frighteningly concepts were twisted in the mind and life of this father.

His former family, like many others, was destroyed. Often out of a whole village or even several villages, only a few people survived, and those who remained remarried and started new families. "We decided to be together, got married, orphans that we were," says Volga Minich about herself and her present husband whose whole family was burned in Khvoinya just like hers.

Similar was the fate of Volga and Mikita Gaidash from the village of Pervomaisk, Rechitsa District...

And that of Alexander Zauer from Bulkovo, Oktyabrsky District...

They had more children. Of course if they were young enough at the time...

Ivan Rubets (Okuninovo Village, Slonim District) said: "I had six children and have six now..."

Often they gave birth to even more children than they were robbed of by the war, by death and the ferocity of the enemy.

Some of them, even many, make a point of reminding us (or themselves again and again) that they had so many children and they have as many now and even more.

They want to "bring them back to life" — all those sons and daughters.

And as we listened to those people and saw their new parental happiness, so full of anxieties — their sacred happiness! — it naturally didn't enter our minds to ask whether it was possible "to bring them back".

But we kept remembering these lines from Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*:





"...God raises Job up again and restores his wealth; many years pass by, and he has other children and loves them all. Good Lord, 'How could he love those new children when the other ones were no more, when he had lost them? Remembering them, could he really be fully happy, as in the past, with the new children, no matter how dear the new ones were to him?'"

The nineteenth century was far from untroubled. But in this century the experience Dostoyevsky describes was the fate of millions of mothers and fathers. All this can be read in the eyes and faces, discerned in the voices of so many villagers!

These tormenting Dostoyevskian thoughts and problems suddenly turned into bitter daily reality... First World War: percentage of the civilian population among all those killed – 13;

Second World War – about 70;

Korean War – 84;

Vietnam War – about 90.

These were the counts made by Quincy Wright, the American professor.¹⁷

Yes, a people's capacity to survive, its natural strength is most important. The people who are quoted in this book are not merely "bringing back" their own children. They are bringing life itself back to life.

Yet, these people have not lost their memories of the past. We sense this in their eyes and voices as they tell us about their present life and their "new" children.

Perhaps *starets* Zosima is right in a way when he expresses Dostoyevsky's hope (and also doubt):

Recalling those dead and gone can one really be completely happy? "But one can, one can! Through the great mystery of human life, the old sorrow gradually turns into quiet, tender joy."

This is a truth of life.

You read it in people's eyes, in their faces. But

you also read something else, something hidden deep within. Something expressed, even cried out as if in unbearable pain, by the Byelorussian novelist Kuzma Chorny, the bard of the village folk. He did not express it in the quiet voice of Zosima but in the outcry of Ivan Karamazov. This is quite natural in our 20th century with its scales... The fate of an entire people was involved. And the very real pain and suffering of people so alive in the memory, so dear to the heart...

"A priest was telling the congregation about how God tested Job's faith. He sent all kinds of misfortunes on him... He knew it was God's punishment but he didn't stop praying to God and praising him, he didn't cherish a grievance against God. God gratified him for this by returning everything he had... more children were born to him, just as many as had died before... For thousands of years people have been told this story and can it be that nobody has ever realized that you can't say such a thing to people because it is a grave lie... If I started another family and if I once more returned to life – had a new house, had my own bread to eat and again had a little son running out to greet me, I could get used to living in another house or riding another horse... But my dead child – it lived, it saw the world, it knew I was its father! There might be another child but it would not be the one who experienced the suffering and that suffering will remain forever because it was real and *nobody can ever make it unreal.*"

This we could sense in the most quiet voices, as if addressed to the whole world!...

Praskovya Adamovna Orlovskaya. Gorodishche Village, Logoisk District, Minsk Region.

"...Sonya was my firstborn, then came Misha,

Vanka and Lenik. Lenik, the youngest, was only nine months and Sonya must have been around thirteen years old. She was the eldest. Misha was nine.

"I go to wake up the children but my husband says:

"‘Don’t touch them.’ We don’t know what to do. It’s already burning all around... And men are already running towards our house, too, dressed in white cloaks they were, and it was a light night. Oh-oh, I think, what are we going to do? We had very old floors in the house and the floorboards were giving in. While we’re talking they rush into the house and he quickly hides in that hole under the floor. But I remain standing there. Thought they wouldn’t do anything to me. One of them is standing in the doorway holding his rifle and another comes up to me like this and says: ‘Strike a light.’

"Actually, I think they lit that little oil lamp themselves... My baby that was nine months old woke up in his cradle and began to cry. I went up to him and took him into my arms. I picked up that child. So I stood there with nothing on but my jacket... And, mind you, it was winter. It’s a good thing I took my kerchief, this big hemp one. So I pressed him to my breast. Sonya, my eldest, woke up. I made her a sign: ‘Sonya, come along with me.’ But the others were fast asleep, I just couldn’t wake them up. And I’m afraid to go up to them.

"Something was just pushing me to cross the threshold – I just couldn’t stop myself...

"I walked out onto the porch holding that child... I can’t... The one that stood there let me pass... I’m all atremble... I walk further into the yard – nobody runs after me. I hide behind the shed... And then I hear the house is burning and they’re shooting and everything... The fire is crackling and burning. I sit there in the bushes

right near the house. Oh, I just can’t stand it, I’m all atremble... I hear my Sonya crying behind the shed... She managed to run out of the house alive...

"I dashed into those bushes and saw my neighbour, Stefka, there. She says: ‘They killed my Grisha and the child, too!... You’re lucky to have at least saved this child. I haven’t got a living soul left!...’

"So I walk along... There was this bathhouse there. I walk toward that bathhouse and see – by then my old man had already climbed out of that hole under the floor. He told me they set the house on fire and he got out of the hole, put out the fire and placed the bodies of Misha and Vanka in there. They were killed. And Sonya was wounded.

"They were all lying in bed. When they told them to lie still she jumped off the stove and lay. One of the bullets just went through her. She never got well after it.

"When they looked back and saw the fire was out they returned to the house and set it on fire again. The fire was roaring away so he crawled out of the hole where he had laid our dead sons and jumped out of the window. Then he ran away... Later I came there, too, with the baby... People gathered whatever clothing they had for me – one woman gave me a kerchief she was wearing, another gave me something else – and I wrapped up the child. I walk on to Selets. And my husband says that our Sonya is alive, too. I heard her weeping myself but couldn’t find her anywhere then... When I arrived in Selets I found Sonya there. People were afraid ... so she was locked up in a house.

"‘Mother, dear, I’m wounded,’ she said.

"‘What am I to do with you? Where are you wounded?’

"‘I don’t know. I ran barefoot with nothing on. I ran all the way to Selets in nothing but my

They referred to this as "the joy of doing their duty"





Stepanida
Dardynskaya

nightshirt and got all frost-bitten. My hands and feet are all frost-bitten. They wrapped me up and laid me here. They looked me over and saw I was wounded so they tore the curtains off the windows and bandaged me up... Mummy dear, go away somewhere and come get me later on. There's nobody around here.'

"Well, so I went to Prudishche, people helped me there. My husband went to Vesnino where some of my family lived. The next day we got ready... We came to Vesnino but then *they* arrived there, too. They took one of the men there to the police. I was still so terrified that I ran away. The partisans had brought my little girl, Sonya, to Vesnino, to my relatives. She was all swollen, poor thing, and so happy to see me again! We sat there together, crying...

"Just then *they* arrived. This was no place for us either. I grasped the girl by the hand, picked up little Lenik and wrapped him in a sheet and ran off. As I was running, I fell on the ice and killed the baby... Dear God, what was I to do now! How could I go on living – having killed my own child! When I remember it all I still feel I can't live!... I carried him on for a long time afterwards but when we unwrapped that sheet we saw the baby was dead!... I just could have laid down and died...

"Still I went on living somehow and am alive to this day. But when I remember it all, I think: what am I living for?"

Stepanida Mikhailovna Dardynskaya. Zhi-lin Brod Village, Slutsk District, Minsk Region.

"...Well, they started to take all our belongings. Took them all away. The men and the women, those who were younger, they left to help drive the cattle and all the rest. Then they went into

each house and began killing people. I had six children, but they were no longer kids – born in 'twenty-seven and older. My oldest son was dressed in a military jacket, he said:

"'Mother,' he said, 'they're coming to kill us!'

"While I went to look out of the window they were already in the kitchen. Three of them came to kill us. The younger children ran to me and I said to him:

"'At least you hide someplace, otherwise they'll take you away to Germany.'

"As soon as they flew in, one of them yelled 'Partisan!' and made for him, and another made for me. When he was killing my son I only had the time to give him one last look... I was holding the little girl in my arms when he fired at me. The bullet missed my head and hit me right here. And I was holding my little daughter, three years old she was, in my arms. I don't know whether she suffocated when I fell, but then I didn't feel anything at all anymore. The children began screaming, he started to shoot at my oldest son and at me and then I don't remember anything more. I came to and looked at those children of mine lying about the house – of course they were all dead. I sat for a while and then lay down again. I just lay there on the floor without moving. There was lots of blood in the house. They come back into the house again. I can't tell if they're the same ones or not... They babbled something and left. I suppose they didn't notice I was alive or they would've finished me off. Then I crawled out into the garden and sat down by the house... Blood was pouring out of me of course... Then they went back to the house and banged something there – soon the whole place was ablaze. I sat there and sat there – bits of roof began falling on me, and my head was badly burned and my clothes were on fire. I had nowhere to go. There was not a soul around now, all was dead quiet. I think maybe

somebody's left somewhere. I walk along and see a little boy lying dead in the field, he'd tried to run away. He was Bolesev's little son. Then I come upon the Krivonosov boy — he's wounded.

"'Auntie,' he says, 'save me!'

"'My poor dear, how can I help you,' I says, 'my blood is draining out and all my teeth have been knocked out. Lie still for a while,' I says; 'perhaps I'll find somebody else.'

"I glanced beyond the river and see crowds of Germans standing there like a herd of sheep. They began firing away at me with their machine-guns. I fell to the ground but it seemed to me I was still running away. But I didn't move an inch. I fell into the water, into the river, and I stayed there till it got dark. Our men found that little boy and laid him in the basement. And there he died. But some of the children were burned alive, who were smaller — they didn't shoot them. Oh me, I don't even remember how many of us were killed in our Perekhody. That's where I lived then. All were killed. If not in the village then with the partisans or at the front. The village doesn't exist at all anymore..."

Nadeya Alexandrovna Neglyui from the village of Krasnaya Storonka, Slutsk District, Minsk Region.

"...They encircled the village and wouldn't let any of us out. They took the men to herd the cattle. Those who were young. They didn't take a single woman, only men. The men are to herd the cattle, and we know all right what will happen to us..."

"I ran back to my house. I was afraid to keep away from the children, I had four children. So they would at least kill me with the children and not out in the street somewhere. Well, so we sit

together in the house. The men are walking round the village, getting the cattle out of the barns. They were already sending those men away from the village. And we remained in the house. Well, they come in and walk around all over the place.

"'What are you going to do with us, sirs?' we ask. 'Kill us, only don't kill our children. Throw them out into the yard, and that's all.'

"It was cold out, a bad winter. Well, so what did they do — went on talking in their own language, you couldn't tell what they were saying. Then they went away and soon returned again. They gave an order and we all fell flat on the floor. We had straw-filled mattresses then, they shook the straw out of those mattresses onto the floor so it would burn better, that straw... We had fallen to the floor like this — my little girl above my head like this and my little boy at my side. My oldest son was a bit further away and he kept crying and saying: 'What are they going to kill us for?...' They were all crying and shrieking..."

"When those Germans walk into the house we get to our knees and beg them not to kill our children. Why kill them? What wrong did they do? My oldest boy was only twelve and the youngest girl was five, the youngest of all. But they can't understand a word we say anyway and just laugh at us... And then they come back in to kill us..."

"One of them takes out a revolver and the other fired from a tommy-gun. We fell to the floor and they began shooting us down as we lay..."

* * *

If you approach the small town of Kopyl from the south, passing through the vast black-soil expanses of Slutsk District, you will see from afar two villages facing each other from the top of two hillocks. Their names are Velikiye Prusy and Maliye Prusy (Large and Small Prusy).



Maria Nagornaya,
chief librarian of a children's library



Maria Kot

On a black field at the entrance to Velikiye Prusy you will come across the tall white slabs of a memorial which can be seen from afar. The last names that are engraved on the slabs, repeated dozens of times with only the first name differing, have become rare in Velikiye Prusy today. Not only whole families, but entire peasant stocks were wiped out.

Among the new names of those living in the village today, one, which death recorded many a time on those big slabs, has survived. Maria Fyodorovna Kot still lives in Velikiye Prusy. She lives there all through the warm season but when winter comes both she and her quiet husband Ivan Silvestrovich leave the village like migrating birds. She goes to stay with *her* son in Minsk and he – with *his* daughter in Kopyl.

Like many others we have already mentioned, these two no longer young people began to live together after their families were killed and they became "orphans". Still, they were more fortunate than many others, for each of them had a child left – she, her son and he, his daughter.

When spring comes the old man and his wife

return from their roving and settle down, surrounded by their tiny orchard and vegetable garden, in their native village of Velikiye Prusy.

They live under their old roof despite the terrible memories that have nestled there to wake them up in the middle of the night like a peal of thunder, to rush at them like a hungry wolf whenever the old people walk down the street among the old trees, passing the old wells...

Before we visited Maria Fyodorovna Kot – our old acquaintance – we went to see her younger friend in Kopyl, Maria Nikolayevna Nagornaya, and recorded everything she told us in the quiet and spacious room of the children's library she is in charge of.

These two women lived through and experienced all that took place in Velikiye Prusy each in her own way. Maria Fyodorovna was in the very midst of the raging fire – she never left the village – while Maria Nikolayevna was with those who hid in the nearby forest, where they saw, and heard, and suffered the tragedy of their entire village going up in flames together with their families and neighbours. The memories of these two

women complement each other to create an authentic and terrifying picture of the events, like two mirrors placed one opposite the other.

"...Well, for me," recalls **Maria Nagornaya**, "that day, September 26, 1942, began when my mother woke me up around seven in the morning and said:

"'Run to your sister at once and tell her the Germans are coming.'

"First thing we had to think of our families. My sister's husband was with the partisans and she had small children. So off I ran.

"...We had a neighbour named Pupeika. He is now on pension and lives in Minsk. But in those days he lived in Prusy. Many intellectuals came from our village — teachers, engineers and doctors. When the war began they all returned to their native village. Pupeika's parents lived here in the village and that's where he stayed during the war. He was high above all the rest of us villagers, understood everything... He was an economist or an accountant by profession, I don't exactly remember now. We had this garage beyond the village, and every morning he would go there, climb on top of the watchtower and examine the surrounding territory and the village outskirts to see if the Germans were anywhere around. The road from Timkovichi to Kopyl could be seen plainly from that tower.

"Well then, on that morning, people said, he climbed that tower, looked around and saw a host of people on the road from Timkovichi to Kopyl. And he say that the Germans were already digging in between Velikiye and Maliye Prusy. He returned to the village and raised the alarm. The Germans are coming from Timkovichi! We also had to know where they were coming from so as to decide which way to escape. The villagers were al-

ways on their guard for they had had to escape many times before. The reason was that many of them fought with the partisans. There was someone from nearly every family fighting in forest detachments. The villagers were afraid, especially those whose men were with the partisans..."

Kopyl, the road from Timkovichi... Further on, wrote Kuzma Chorny, "one hears the dialect of Nesvizh and Slutsk". The rich language of this major Byelorussian prose-writer springs from these parts, as do the many folk characters in his novels, the varied peasant types — hard-working, generous, modest and warm-hearted... This is particularly the way he saw them when the war and the nazi invasion separated him from his native parts. While writing about his heroic fellow-countrymen, the partisans who fought against the cruel and merciless "iron beast", he was gravely ill; he lived in Moscow, but his thoughts were with them all the time. Anxiously he wondered what was going on there in those villages where all of his prototypes, his people, had been left.

"Last night I heard in a radio broadcast that we've had taken Timkovichi, Velikaya Raevka and Zhavolki," reads the entry for July 2, 1944, in Kuzma Chorny's "Diary". "These are all my native parts. How my soul yearns to be there! It is always there. It is there that all my characters live, all the roads, landscapes, trees, houses, human characters I have ever written about. Whenever I speak about Skipyevskoye Perebrodye I think of the village of Skipyevo near Timkovichi, nestled between two forests, of dear old Maloye Seli-shche, whose beauty so enraptured my deceased mother."

How much these people and these parts, so dear to Kuzma Chorny, have seen and experienced! How much all our villages, settlements and

towns — all dear to someone — went through during those endless nights made light as day by the raging fires and those days made black as pitch by death and misery!

Here is the story of one such long, black September day in Velikiye Prusy as it is fixed in the memory of two women from Slutsk District.

Maria Nagornaya

"...So off I ran. First thing I did was to rush to the threshing barn, not into the house. My father was threshing there because my sister had no other man to help her. He was threshing and planning to go sowing. I ran up to him: 'Daddy,' I says, 'you've got to run away!'

"It was enough to say that for people to get ready and run off. As soon as I said that he immediately quit winnowing, locked the threshing barn and followed me into the house. My sister was kindling the fire in the stove: she had the firewood in there and was sticking in some straw... The children were already up. As soon as I ran into the house she said:

"'What? Do we have to run away again?'

"'Yup,' I said.

"'Well then, run home,' she said, 'we are nearer to the forest.'

"I rushed into the street, and my father with me. On the way we ran into her oldest son, he was only ten then. He was back from night-watch, had gone to graze the horse. He had taken the horse to his grandfather because the old man used it, and was now running home. Well, we told him the Germans were coming from Maliye Prusy, so he made for the forest at once. When I got home I saw no one was left in the house, everyone was in the vegetable garden, on the way to the forest. Mother said:

"'Hurry up, you two, everybody has already run off. I stayed to wait for you.'

"We all took off. When we got there we didn't hide far at first. We didn't know it wasn't safe even in the forest. We just stand at the edge and watch. Some are still running to join us, others are already thinking of going back... We waited and waited... It must have been about eleven by that time — still my sister hadn't come. Neither she nor her children. Well, my mother says:

"'I'll go have a look. Why didn't she come? Maybe she was too late? I'll go see.'

"Her mother's heart couldn't bear the anxiety. So she returned to the village, to her daughter's place. But she was no longer there. Maria Fyodorovna Kot, the woman you asked me about, happened to live next door. It turned out that they hadn't run to the forest but hidden in the bushes — there were bushes in the marsh at the other end of the village. So most of the people living at that end ran there to hide. And that Maria Kot returned, well, you know, to have a look at her place or something. Because, you see, everybody stopped whatever they were doing, the moment the news reached them. She returned and on the way saw my mother walking to those bushes so as to take the family away into the forest, where the rest of us were. Maria said to her:

"'Why bother going? The children are perfectly all right running around there.'

"By that time they had begun to fire quite hard at the forest from mortars. It was a big forest, stretching all the way from Prusy to Kokoritsy and Poteiki. Still, mother ran beyond the village to get to those bushes, thinking that since they were shelling the forest it really might be quieter in the bushes. She went to the forest through the village. She met a young lad, Stanevich was his name, on the way. He joined the partisans later on, but at that time he was still in the village. His

brother was already with the partisans then. He said:

"Where are you running, auntie? No need to hide any more. Don't you see the partisans are already on the way from Stepury?"

"Because they'd climbed on top of a hillock and could see a cordon moving along from Stepury. Mother was old and inexperienced but still she could tell who was who: she had seen real partisans after all and her own son was with the partisans. So she said:

"Petrok, what kind of partisans are they? They are all wearing helmets! Where would the partisans get those helmets?"

"That's certainly true," he replied.

"It was about a hundred or a hundred and fifty metres from the village to the forest. And my mother had to crawl on all fours, because such heavy firing began! From Maliye Prusy and from Stepury, all around! They criss-crossed the whole pasture with fire. You couldn't walk standing up straight. She reached the forest, wanted to go and find us. People by that time were sticking closer together and began to go farther from the edge, deeper into the forest. There was the big ditch there overgrown with young fir trees that hid it from sight, and we had already hidden in that ditch. Everybody. Mother was making her way to the ditch when she came across a little girl, one of our neighbours, hiding, and she said to her:

"What are you hiding for, Volga?"

"You better hide, too, auntie," she replied. "The Germans are searching the roads."

"She came and found us. We stayed there all day without knowing anything. Some of the men climbed a tall tree to take a look. All was quiet. There was no telling what was going on in the village, but nobody wanted to leave the woods because they could see the Germans were there and

were driving out the cattle... But what else they were doing we didn't know..."

Maria Kot

"...So they encircled us and marched on four metres apart. They came up to us:

"Get up, all of you!"

"They pointed their rifles at us and got us all up from the potato field... They herded us to the road between Timkovichi and Stepury. They ordered us to sit down in the middle of the road and a German comes along with a map hanging from his chest and an Alsatian by his side. Must have been some big shot. We're sitting there expecting them to start killing us off. But no. The big shot told us to go back and bring the horses home from the fields. Who was going to get those horses, what the hell did we need them for if we knew they were going to kill us. Well, we all went home. True, those who could, who had some hiding place, hid themselves. But where could we hide? I walked to and fro about the house but there was nowhere to hide. At noon I went out into the street. But it was impossible to walk outside — bullets are whining all over the place. The Germans come asking for eggs. They can see there aren't any partisans here but still they dug in all around the village. People had no place to go.

"Let's run off to the clay hut."

"There was a clay hut some man had made at the end of the village, and we thought the bullets wouldn't reach us there... It was outside the village, beyond the threshing floors and pretty far off from all the other structures. But the Germans noticed this hut and that people were moving about in it. They started firing at that clay hut and smashed all the windows. And we're already inside; there were maybe twenty-five of us or even more. And two were wounded — two women,



Sasha Doroshkevicheva and Manya. Then when evening fell they came. The sun was already setting. They came and started yelling: 'Get out, all of you.' We walked out. They thought perhaps there were partisans here. But they saw there were only women and children...

"'Turn back!'

"So we returned to the hut.

"'Lie down! Passports! Money!'

"'Dear sirs, please!...' cried the women.

"But they repeated their 'Lie down!' and that's all. Then they began firing their tommy-guns. There was a stove in there, a heater and also a ta-



ble. We all fell down. Actually, me and my family fell under the table and the rest fell further, behind the stove. So they gunned us down. My smallest daughter screamed:

"'Oh, mummy!...'

"I glanced at her and saw the bullet hit the bridge of her nose. I only heard her death-rattle. I didn't so much as hear them kill my older daughter, the one you can see there in the photograph. One of them finished firing and went to help the other one behind the stove. I went and took a peep like this.

"One of the women won't let him move the bed



To victims of nazi brutality in Velikiye Prusy



aside, for her children are hiding there, but he hits her on the head with his revolver. And he starts to smash up those women and children with the bed. Not everybody died at once. They're moaning and wheezing, those people, and the children are squealing, Lord!...

"When I peeped out he noticed I was still alive. So what did he do: he came over and cursed me out. He stood right over me brandishing his revolver. A dark blue revolver — and the next thing I see is him firing right at my face! I'm lying there amidst my children and he keeps ... that powder... and the bullets keep coming — whang, whang. He fired, shot from that revolver until he got tired of it. Then he grabbed me by the leg and dragged me through the blood across the hut, through the blood from the people there... As he dragged me he began whistling, whistled for some time and walked out!

"He went out... But the clay hut had a tiled roof and it wouldn't easily burn. The owner of the hut had some hay stored on the front porch because he didn't have a shed. So he began to set fire to that hay. As they set fire to it they whistled, and talked, and cursed, and what not...

"Then my son rose to his feet. The one that is now gone to some resort or other, George. He said something and makes for the threshold. I think perhaps it's that German again. I don't dare look this time, just lie in this pool of blood... Then I hear him go flap, flap to the threshold... Maybe I'll just take a look and see who it is. I peeked, and saw it was my lad! So I says:

"George, dear, where are you going?"

"And he says: 'Mother, could it be you're alive? I was just thinking — let them kill me too!...'

"I'm alive, dear... Go lie down in the same place, child. Perhaps it's a lucky place, perhaps we'll both survive."

"He walked over and lay in the same place where he had lain before. Perhaps a minute went by ... they must have heard us talking! One of them came flying into the hut.

"Get up!" he hollered.

"He hollered three times like that but didn't turn us over. People were wheezing their last in there... It was simply unbearable! He ran around the place, glanced inside the stove and underneath it, too. There was a little cupboard, and he also looked inside the cupboard. Then he threw a grenade under the stove... He whistled for some time and walked out..."*

Maria Nagornaya

"It was almost evening, the sun was setting... It hadn't yet set but was already quite low in the sky. Well, the men decided it was time to go see what was going on there. Several people got ready to go. I went along with them: my father went and I followed him. We had reached the very edge of the forest when we saw some Germans — literally about ten metres away... They struck a match — wanted to light a cigarette or something. It wasn't quite dark yet but it was twilight in the forest. We all started running back helter-skelter, all in different directions. Only the three of us remained together: my father, my mother and myself. We even lost my nephew."

QUESTION: "Did the Germans fire at you?"

"Yes, they did. You see, they were afraid to enter the forest, and thought that perhaps we were partisans. But they didn't run after us, just fired away. We sat in hiding all alone, we couldn't find the rest of the people. It was completely dark by then, and there was a glow in the sky. We were scared to death — there were these crackling

* We have compiled Maria Kot's story from two tape recordings made at different times.

sounds all around and it seemed like somebody was coming our way on iron wheels. But nobody was coming. It turned out the houses were burning in the village and it was the tiles that made that crackling noise..."

Maria Kot

"Well, they nursed the fire for as long as they wanted, and finally the roof did begin to burn, caught fire even though it was covered with tiles. Then they left. The wood under the tiling burnt up and the roof collapsed... So that lad of mine said: 'Mother, we'll burn to death!...'

"There was no glass in the windows, only the frames remained. They had shattered it. I said: 'Well, where can we go? They're still whistling out there.'

"They were still standing some distance away where it wasn't dangerous. The roof burnt up and collapsed, but we still go on lying there. We can no longer hear them shouting or whistling outside the hut. And the ceiling goes crack, crack, ready to crash down on us... Well, I think, they didn't kill us, but that ceiling will cripple us when it falls down and that will be the end of us. I rose to my feet and said:

"'Well, let's run away now! Let's get out of here and run!'

"I rose from the earthen floor. The bed was standing right under the window. I smashed the window and looked out. We can hear shouting and shooting and people screaming someplace... But there's not a soul near us; all is quiet.

"'Let's beat it now!'

"George climbed out and I got hold of my younger daughter, she was nine... I grabbed her, lifted her and laid her on that bed, and myself crawled over her... Her dress is burning and so is mine... I dragged her out and brought her to the

pit where they mixed the clay for the hut, and laid her in there... Then I climb back through those flames for my elder daughter... You know, I think when the ceiling tumbles down she will be burnt up! As if it wasn't enough that they killed her, now she'll burn up as well!... So I climbed back in again, crawled in through the window. I reached for my daughter. She was a big girl, taller than me. My little daughter! She was already seventeen or so then. I dragged her and lifted her body. She was so young and soft! She was still warm — how could I carry her! But I summoned all my strength and managed to lift her. I dragged her to the bed, then onto the bed, onto the window-sill, I climbed over her myself and pulled her out. I said: 'George, dear, give me a hand...'

"'I can't, mother,' he said. 'I'm wounded. I couldn't help you.'

"I carried her all the way to the pit and covered her body with leaves... This mass of burdocks had grown up there that autumn... I covered them up and stopped to catch my breath for a minute. I felt so scared there — it was unbearable! It was getting dark already. The rest of the houses had all burned down — they set them on fire earlier...

"'Now,' I says, 'let's beat it...'

"There was a bit of fence there and a potato field — so we crawled there on all fours. There were no people around us but at a distance we could hear shrieking and screaming! Lord! They twisted off some people's arms and legs... There was this Volka Vorchakova — well, they flayed off all her skin — you know, just like a pair of gloves! They wrenched off her arm, too — tortured her terribly...

"We made off. I raked away the earth in the furrows of the potato field with my hands like this, laid the lad, George, there in the furrow and myself lay with my head on his legs somehow, and there we lay... We had lain there for only a little

while when a truck comes towards that clay hut... They couldn't pass through the village 'cause everything was burning there, so they went past that hut. It was already dark when they drove by. They opened up the sides of the truck and walked around with flashlights looking for things people had carried out of the houses. They brought them all over and dumped them into the back of the truck, and we're lying there all that time... And the pigs, a pox on them, smell us lying there and keep grunting and snuffling around... I lie there thinking that if they notice and come over they'll kill us!... Their flashlights shone right by our side, well, no farther than from here to the table, but they didn't notice us. They collected as much of everything as they wanted and drove away..."

Maria Nagornaya

"...We left the forest at midnight. The grown-ups kept worrying about the cattle they'd left behind and the cows that hadn't been milked all day, that was bad, too. So off we went. We enter the village and see all is quiet, nobody's around. We reached our yard and found our house on fire. The cow is standing in her usual place; the cattle also senses danger. She's standing in the vegetable garden. My mother was about to milk the cow when we saw people running our way again. We didn't yet know the Germans had killed all those people... We saw people running from the village, those who had got there before us... And one of them, Berezovsky, says:

"The hell with the cows! The Germans are still in the village and here you are pottering around with your cows!..."

"So we again dropped everything and fled to the forest. There were no Germans at this end of the village near the forest, they were all at the other end.

"It was then that Kovalchuk came running into the forest. He was there, in the village, while the killing was going on and he told us a lot about it. Not everything, but what he saw. He didn't know they had killed everybody, he thought it was just a few people..."

Maria Kot

"I had so little strength left in me, I couldn't move a finger. There was a buzzing in my head so I couldn't hear a thing... Then after a while I heard screaming and crying... It was those people who were left alive and had come out from hiding to look at the corpses... People were crying. Those who had come back from the forest. It was already far into the night, after they had gone. We lay still because how were we to know why they were crying... I wanted to get to my feet but just swayed and staggered... My legs refused to support me. My son saw I couldn't get up so he pulled me up by the arm. I stood there for a while, we took a few steps, about ten maybe, and then I fell down again. I fell down, he pulled me up and I said: 'Help me along.'

"My eyes were plastered together with earth and blood and I couldn't see a thing. They'd got so smeared when I raked up the earth in the potato field... He took me across the street. There was a ditch there so I could at least rinse my eyes to see where I was going. I rinsed my eyes, rinsed them clean, but I was still all covered with blood, my clothes were all covered with blood. He led me to that ditch... People are running away. Volka Udovineva comes running – who traveled back and forth, keeping the partisans provided with things from Minsk... With her sister, Manya... And they say:

"Auntie, dear!..."

"I tell them that only two of us are left of the

whole family and even so George is wounded.

"'Bandage him up.'

"How can I when all my things are covered with blood?

"'Auntie, run away,' they say, 'because they said at Sventokhovsky's place in Maliye Prusy that the Germans would come back again!'

"And this fellow from Maliye Prusy is standing there, a relative of ours — they came to see what happened to us... And the pigs are already eating my daughter-in-law — they gnawed her body... And one of my relatives says:

"'Let's go carry her over to a pit someplace!...'"

Maria Nagornaya

"Morning came at last. It began to get light. People gradually began to gather at the edge of the forest and leave it. By morning they, the Germans, were gone. They left. They collected all they needed — cattle and whatever of people's belongings they found — and drove away.

"As we came out into the pasture we saw two partisans riding out of the forest. They were on horseback, obviously on reconnaissance. They didn't know the whole tragedy yet, that all those people had been killed...

"Now we all rushed back to the village, to our yards — to see if anybody had survived anywhere or not. I remember that on the way we met my nephew, my mother's grandson. He was running. It turned out he had already been in his yard. He was crying... (*She bursts into tears.*) We ran over there. True, she was lying in the street... All burnt up. These horrible burnt bodies! You can't describe without having seen it yourself...

"Well, that's all. Only four houses remained in the whole village. And maybe two or three threshing barns, not more.

"When the partisans appeared they told us it was dangerous to remain in the village and that all who were left should hide someplace. It turned out they were right and we left without horses or cows. We walked all the way to Rudny, across the river...

"There was this young woman in our village, Nyusha Sologubova. She had a small daughter and no husband. She was still alive then. People said that by some miracle the club house remained after all the other houses had burned down. It was just an ordinary house. Nyusha was wounded, she kept asking for water, and some of the villagers carried her into that club house. It didn't enter their heads that the Germans would come back again to finish their burning. But they did. And her child was also alive. They threw the child into a well... Nyusha herself they stabbed terribly. And then they set the club on fire...

"We lived in a field in Rudny for some time, under a haystack. Then my mother said we had to get back to Prusy somehow — all those dead people were lying around, and her daughter among them.

"'I'll be going,' she said.

"But father... He had this nervous breakdown, lay there shivering all over... He was quite ill. Still, my mother went back to Prusy and took along her niece, my first cousin. To feel safer. She was from Ogorodniki, that's another village. They got there, and the Germans come back again: they'd come on Sunday and now on Tuesday they'd come back. They were carting away everything they possibly could... Germans again! They couldn't find a place to hide, so they ran off toward the forest, reached the bottom of the hill, and there was lupine growing there, on someone's patch of land. We all had such patches then. So they hid in that lupine, and towards evening the Germans left.

"The partisans came to collect the bones, what was left of those people. Mother said that one of them, Yankovsky, tried to count up the bodies... But how could you keep count when nothing left of them but the bones... He only said: remember, whoever remains alive, that there are five hundred people buried in this grave. That was those whose remains they could gather and besides them others were found and buried.

"For our family, too, we dug a hole in the orchard and buried them all there. My sister and both her children... There was also our aunt, who lived with her...

"...Her name was Volga Gulitskaya. She told us at the time how it happened. When they came she was alone in the house. They fired and she fell.

"I fell," she said, "and lay still but I realized I'm alive, only shot through, not dead... I peek out the window. It seems the house isn't burning yet. Where in the world are those Germans? I peek out the window... I also look at myself in the mirror: I looked awful, all covered with blood... I lay down again in the same place."

"The Germans also brought in two village lads, chased them into the house from the street. They shot her in the big room, and them in the kitchen. It was horrible how they wheezed in their death agony! Perhaps it was because they were so young? Then they came back to where she was in the room. Perhaps they wanted to have their fun with her... They dragged her by the leg into the fire. At that time only the cowshed was burning. But they decided to throw her into the fire that very minute. So they pulled her there by the leg, she said. Her head was dangling helplessly and she said she kept trying to turn over to the side that wasn't wounded. Her neck and head were shot through like this, you see... They dragged her

to the cattle-shed. They couldn't come too close because of the fire — this was no campfire. They swung her, one by the arm and the other by the leg, and flung her into the fire. But she fell short of the fire, next to it. But they didn't see it 'cause of the smoke. She was all covered with burns but managed to crawl off to the vegetable garden, into the potato field and sprinkled herself with earth. That's how she survived... She died about ten years ago, in Minsk. Her son is still alive, works at a tractor factory."

QUESTION: "Was her son with her then?"

"The children had run away. Everybody was in such panic that they all ran as best they could, the children in one direction and their parents in some other. People fled toward Stepury and toward Skipyevo, the only place they didn't run to was Maliye Prusy; we thought the Germans would be coming from only that direction. But they surrounded us on all four sides. We hadn't seen them because of the bushes and... No matter where people ran the Germans caught them all. They ran right into them. The only escape was the forest. Why? Because they surrounded the forest further away from the village.

"But there were very few of us who hid there... Now there are hardly any natives living in Prusy, they are all newcomers..."

The memory of the people inscribed on the white slabs standing in the midst of a black field near Velikiye Prusy; the burning memories of the war and all it brought and left stamped on the earth and in people's souls; the reminiscences recorded in this book — they are permeated with torment and anxiety but also hope that at long last, peace on our planet, drenched in blood and tears "from the crust to the core" (Fyodor Dostoyevsky), will never again be merely a period of preparation for a new "bloodbath".

I Can't... I Don't Know How to...

The taste of fear and misery broke through the years to assail them again, and the women would somehow shrink together, suddenly fall silent or burst into tears...

Sometimes we begged their forgiveness and in a roundabout way made them realize how necessary it was for them to continue their story.

We couldn't bring ourselves to importune some old and feeble women any further.

There were quite a few such occasions.

It also often happened that an old and even not too old woman would in her shyness tell us less than she might have, or else would really not know how to describe what she'd been through. One of them actually began thus:

"If only I could put it all into the right words!..."

But in their "clumsy" little stories there is something especially profound and truthful...

Yefrosinya Yegorovna Makeyeva, 94-years-old. Rovnoye Village, Shumilino District, Vitebsk Region.

We came just as she was being taken home from the local hospital in Kozyany. The village jeep had come to fetch her and a young mother; the hospital nurses walked to the jeep supporting the old woman by the arms and handed the young mother her wrapped-up infant once she was sitting inside the vehicle.

Following the doctor's advice we didn't bother the old woman here but decided to drop in on her at home later on.

Some three hours later, after we had visited several other villages, we stopped in Rovnoye. Yefrosinya Yegorovna was sitting in the sun in front of her house, and a brood of little chicks were peeping and pecking away at something at her feet.

Here is her story:

"...They took all of us away, chased us out of the house and drove us there into the forest, beyond Drozhaki. Straight toward the mines, the whole village. Then they herded us into a barn and began selecting the families of partisans. They took my old man, too, and led him away. Well, I heard sounds of shooting nearby and began to scream but he lashed me on the head. (*Bursts into tears.*)

"And then they sent us back home. They shot only one out of every family. Told us all to take off our shoes, robbed us of all we had...

"We came home — there was not a spoon or pot in the house, nothing.

"Manage as best you can, woman...

"Then, two days or so later, she went (*points at her daughter*) with some other girls and scabby little mare to gather those dead... She found my older daughter among them bodies, too.

"So there were three of my daughter's children and two of my son's — five children — left orphans without a roof over their heads..."

Matruna Yefimovna Akulich, 82-years-old. Pribylovichi Village, Lelchitsky District, Gomel Region.

"...I've seen too much misery in my life, lads, that's why there is no happiness for me...

"...They began firing at me and I fell to the ground. I was stunned and if it weren't for that they would have killed me for sure. They came up and turned me over saying: 'Kaput!' I knew I shouldn't answer. I lay there all covered with blood. I was wounded in the leg. I peeped and saw them smashing up the bee-hives. There were bee-hives there in the garden, and honey...

"I lay still for a while and then started to crawl

on all fours. There was a ditch there, all frozen over it was, without any snow on top. And I thought: where am I to go? I staggered on half-conscious...

"I got to our shelter in the forest and found my children weeping for me; they had been told the Germans shot me.

"You see, my lads, I had gone to the village hoping to bring back some potatoes... My children, two of them, stayed behind in that forest shelter. The moment I ran in there my children just grabbed hold of me..."

Fedora Alexeyevna Golik, 77-years-old. Apanaskovich Village, Ushachi District, Vitebsk Region.

"...I've got no memory left. I can still hear this din and these voices but I don't remember anything of what they said.

"What is there to say? I can just say I had a sister, my kith and kin. I can't make myself talk about her... She just lay there ... and the chickens pecked her blood...

"I also had a son in the Army and another one — he was just a boy of eight, didn't even go to school yet. I had three daughters besides.

"I was in the house. I was sitting by the window and saw the Germans driving. I was just going to walk out when I heard them fire — bang! They killed her, I said. Because of her son that was in the Army.

"Later, when the Red Army came, the soldiers asked me:

"'Are you glad we've come?'

"'Course I'm glad. My own son is also somewhere in the Army.'

"And they say: 'Too bad there's nobody from the Vitebsk area among us. We're only from Mos-

cow and Siberia. Well, lady, if you're really glad we've come, ask your girls to sit down to dinner with us.'

"Naturally, my daughters, like all girls, are shy about it. But I says:

"'Share their meal with them, girls. Be glad the Red Army has come and saved us from those fiends... Much of our blood has been shed as it is!... We have to live now...'"

Maria Illarionovna Kononovich, 73-years-old. Okuninovo Village, Slonim District, Grodno Region.

"You know, I tell all those things, but there is such an anxious feeling in my heart that I can't...

"Well, they drove us all out, herded us together. I had three grown daughters, one was eighteen and the other sixteen and... I took a small pail and went outside and saw the Germans coming in three rows, the vermin. Some came through the backyards, others along the street and the rest from over there... I had already gone out of the house, as if my heart felt something was wrong. Still I thought maybe they wouldn't come to our village. But then they turned me back:

"'Go right back!'

"I returned home and they asked:

"'Your papers, your papers!'

"And I says to the children: 'Go hide someplace.'

"'Oh, Mummy, what'll we do if they kill you?'

"'Tearing children away from their mothers...

"'And my husband says:

"'There's nothing more frightening than death when it's at your heel!'

"They chased us all out and we went along. Everybody was moaning and screaming, young and old, everybody...



Ozarichi. 1944





Memorial to those who died in the Ozarichi extermination camp

"I was all covered with blood. One bullet hit me in the eye-brow and another went through here and knocked out my teeth. I lay without moving. Some they finished off by kicking them. Those who were still alive..."

"They killed everyone who tried to run away. All the blood there was!..."

"I hope you never know this horror, my lads, hope nothing like it ever happens again..."

Anastasya Ivanovna Skripka, 73-years-old.
Osveya Village, Verkhnedvinsk District, Vitebsk Region.

"...Then they rounded up the village and drove us out onto the road. There was this crossroad there, with road going this way and that way, and they drove us out on to one of those roads. Then some big shots came, with these great tall hats. Well then, they said something between themselves. We don't know their language. We just heard the words: 'Partisan Kaput!' At this we guessed they were probably going to kill the partisan families. We had to be shot – this we understood.

"So they herded us along this big road and then there was a little path into the forest. They ordered us to go left. As soon as we all turned left they began firing at us. We all fell to the ground, some alive, some dead.

"I was wounded in the leg. One of the bullets missed me, it passed by here and only tore the collar of my coat and my kerchief. Another hit me in the back but I was carrying a bag of dried bread over my shoulder and it got stuck in there. I found it among the bread later. (*She laughs.*) This long, rifle bullet."

QUESTION: "When you fell to the ground did you realize you were alive?"

"No, I fell together with my stepdaughter and her children. The little boy screamed. He only had time to say: 'Ow!' before he fell. We all fell down. They fired at us from behind, we couldn't see them shooting. We weren't supposed to raise our heads. The little girl said: 'Mother, I'm wounded!' I was walking together with them, a little in front like this and she behind. And my stepdaughter told the girl: 'Keep quiet!' Then the Germans came up to us. They are going to kill us now, I thought. But they didn't touch me. I just lay there, you see.

"When the Germans walked away we rose to our feet and went off..."

Volga Kirillovna Gordeyenok, 73-years-old.
Zhary Village, Ushachi District, Vitebsk Region.

"They raided us on a Saturday morning when we were still in bed and we scattered all over the place.

"When they began shooting and driving people at the other end of the village, my old man crouched behind the stove with our little son and daughter. And I stood by the window. I saw them taking my brother away to kill him. And I'm standing at the window, watching.

"Next they took my brother's wife away, to kill her, but a little later she came back somehow, but then they seized her again and drove her away..."

"They set fire to the village. I grabbed hold of my clothes trunk to pull it out and yelled at my old man: 'Help me carry it out. We'll all burn to ashes otherwise!'

"But he says: 'I'd rather burn than let the Germans kill me!'

"He wouldn't come out. As I was carrying the trunk to the threshold I saw my husband's sister running by.

“‘They’ve killed them all! We’re the only ones left!’ she cried out.

“I fainted right on the porch and rose to my feet only when the house started burning.

“Then my husband grabbed our children from behind the stove and ran to hide in the bushes with them.

“The first group of Germans had gone so I thought I might as well go and dig out some of those killed. But my husband caught up with me, seized me and locked me up in a bathhouse. He leaped out of the bushes and pushed me into the bathhouse. I stood in there yelling: ‘Help, help!’ I couldn’t understand what was going on.

“He let me out only after the second group of Germans had left.

“Well, that’s all. We lived through it all...”

QUESTION: “Did they kill many people here?”

“Very many. Seventy, all in one day. Herded them together in a pit and shot them dead...”

Matruna Vasilyevna Budnik, 72-years-old. Rudnya Village, Oktyabrsky District, Gomel Region.

“A German came into the house. I was a widow and had five children. I remember this red-headed German took a stick and hustled me and my children into a truck outside. They hustled us out.

“They threw us into the truck and drove us away. To the Ozarichi concentration camp.

“Brought us there and shoved us out.

“Those women who had no strength left they killed in the middle of the road. I was walking along with my children when suddenly my daughter Sasha here fell down – she now runs the railway switches here, lets the train pass. So she

fell down in the middle of the road and they tried to trample her under their horses’ hooves, purposely ran her over in a cart. But she landed between the wheels and stayed alive.

“She was all wet through when I scooped her up. It was before Easter – all this snow and water around...”

“They placed us behind barbed wires. They had a big pit dug in the ground and those of the children who grew weak, ’cause they didn’t give us anything to eat there, they would throw in alive. Wherever we went we had to step over dead bodies, there were killed people all over the place!...

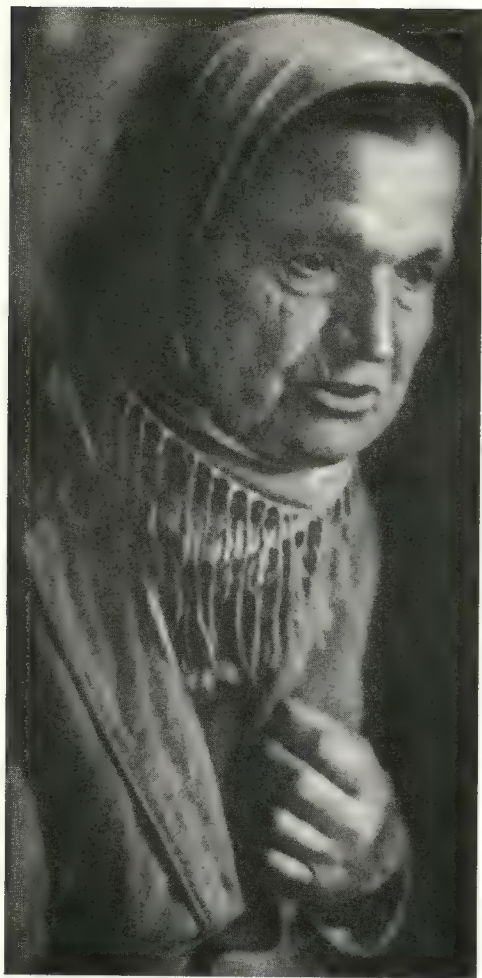
“My other daughter – she now lives in Vitebsk with her husband – begged me: ‘Mother, give me something to drink! Water, water!’ But, my dears, when I bent down to get some snow he hit me on the shoulders with the butt of his rifle.

“‘Oh, mother,’ they cried. ‘We won’t ask you for water anymore, we don’t want any, just so long as he doesn’t hit you again!’”

“When the children began asking for bread – they would hit out with their rifles. If you raised your head and he saw it – he’d shoot you down... We lay in the snow like that for two weeks with nothing to eat.

“Then ours liberated us. They marched along, so young they were – these mere lads, not soldiers. When a shell fell nearby, they wouldn’t shout anything about war, they would scream ‘mother!’ Their hair and beards had grown long. I sat there crying as they marched along. Our children were terribly hungry, so those lads filled a messtin with water, soaked three pieces of dried bread in it and handed them to me – to give to the children to eat.

“When we first saw it was our Army we couldn’t believe our eyes...”



Paraska Kozik

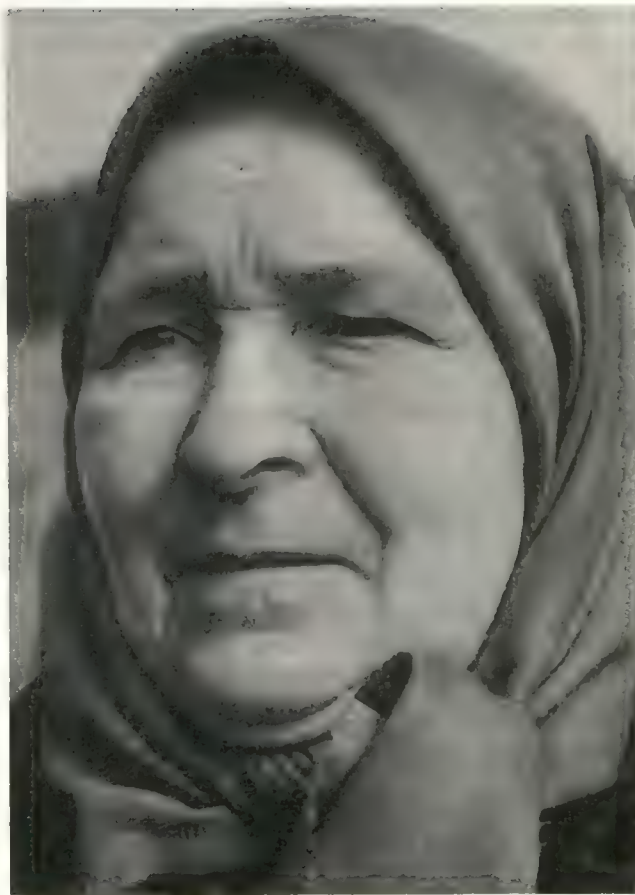


"If only I could put it all into the right words! ..."

(A war-time photograph)



Alyona Lapot



Ganna Vasilevskaya

Ganna Mikhailovna Vasilevskaya, 67-years-old. Goreloye Village, Dokshitsy District, Vitebsk Region.

"When they started firing at the other end of the village I ran with this old woman to her house. There was no time to get to my own place so we both went running into her yard. She was so scared, that old woman, that she couldn't unlock the door, her hands trembled so. So I unlocked it myself and she ran after me into the house and crouched by my side while I hid under the bed behind the sheet.

"A German walked in and bang! — killed her on the spot and himself walked off and set the house on fire.

"And I sit there in the fire. The place is full of those Germans everywhere around so I can't go out, and everything is now on fire.

"Later the Germans went off then, so I clambered out into the vegetable garden and crawled farther and farther away and then ran off to a neighbouring village..."

Yeva Pavlovna Gorb, 66-years-old. Puzichi Village, Soligorsk District, Minsk Region.

"...They drove into the forest, they say, surrounded all the people there and didn't allow them out of the forest into the open. There used to be an estate there before, and they herded them into one of the buildings, a cattle-shed... It was only in the evening that I learned they were no more...

"Well, the fire raged so there was a column of black smoke going right up to the sky. Well, those carters — there are all kinds of people — one was stealing people's things that were left, but another one, a Latvian, said to me:

"'Alack, lassy, what did your people get killed for, both young and old, with little children, and even babies in cradles?...'"

"The ground disappeared from under my feet when I heard this but he still went on...

"Nobody was left but me. They burned seven hundred and eighty people in this one cattle-shed, it had once belonged to the landlord.

"Only three people were left of the entire village, and they've already died.

"We come from the settlement..."

Alyona Danilovna Lapot, 62-years-old. Goreloye Village, Dokshitsy District, Vitebsk Region.

"...I was left all alone... (*Bursts into tears.*) I have many times forgotten how it all was.

"We had a family then... Well, I had a father and a mother and a sister. My sister was killed—we never even found her. She went off to another village, to Klinniki. But I stayed behind with one of the village women, Marfa Poterukha was her name. When they began to set the village on fire we first ran into the house. They went around the village killing people. They entered every house. We rushed into the house. There was also another woman with us, Pilip Poterukha's wife, and we all hid in a pit.

"The house was already burning. When we saw it was burning we jumped through the window. Poterukha's wife stayed there by the house, but the two of us ran out into the barley patch.

"A German came round.

"We lay there, one behind the other. He killed her right on the spot and wounded me in the arm, and another bullet went through my neck, right here.

"That's all..."

Paraska Ivanovna Kozik, 60-years-old.
Bobrovichi Village, Ivatsevichi District, Brest
Region.

"I was pregnant, my youngest son was three years old then. My other son, he was seven, had run off to the forest alone.

"A German came into the house.

"‘Woman,’ he said, ‘give me some linen to make leg-bindings.’

"But he didn’t take it.

"‘Woman,’ he said, ‘give me some milk.’

"But he didn’t drink it.

"‘Woman,’ he said, ‘you’re going to be killed today.’

"Coatless as I was, in nothing but my skirt, I went running out of the house.

"They ran after me, rifles in hand.

"‘Go where the shooting is!’ they said.

"But I dashed into the alder thickets. I saw my mother-in-law lying there killed. She was running to fetch the mare. As I crawled under a wire my skirt got caught. They fired at me — my skirt was full of bullet burns.

"Well, I thought, looks like I’m going to live!

"The Germans walked about looking for our shepherd boys to do away with them though they were just kids. My own little lad sat hiding behind a tree stump.

"I gave birth in the woods. The men made me a cabin. I spent the night there under the snow. I had nothing to eat for two days after I gave birth. I found a mushroom, baked it and put it in the baby’s mouth. He sucked it and stopped whimpering... If it had happened now he wouldn’t have lived through it for sure.

"So the men made me a cabin and brought me whatever food they could. I stayed there all winter. I’d feed him, but myself—I suffered terribly.

"We stayed in the woods until the war ended.

"That boy I gave birth to there now lives in Telekhany, he’s already built himself a house there."

Zinaida Lukyanovna Ruta, 55-years-old.
Osveya Village, Verkhnedvinsk District, Vitebsk
Region.

"...They caught us in the forest. Two hundred and fifty people. Because the Germans counted ‘two hundred and fifty’. They lined us all up and fired their tommy-guns at us. We all fell to the ground. I was holding my daughter in my arms — she was killed, two years old she was."

QUESTION: "Did they say anything after they lined you up?"

"They just lined us up four people to a row and fired their tommy-guns... When they fired their tommy-guns we all fell to the ground. I was wounded in the shoulder and another bullet hit my leg. But my little daughter was killed. They killed her the second time round — hit her in the temple. I was wounded myself, this side was all black, singed when they shot me."

QUESTION: "How did you manage to get away later?"

"Well, I wasn’t the only one left. There’s this woman in our village, Anastasya Skripka. My leg was like this, and she began tugging at it:

"‘Zina, Zina, get up! Are you alive or not?’

"Gradually I came to. We all got to our feet, the remaining six of us. Six out of all those people. Two of us six have died since then. One woman left for Siberia..."

QUESTION: "Were the Germans gone when you got up?"

"Yes, they had. We went deeper into the forest

then. It was already night then and pitch dark. We spent the night there, under the bushes..."

Maria Lavrentyevna Bavtruk, 52-years-old. Yuzefovo Village, Verkhnedvinsk District, Vitebsk Region.

"If only I could put it all into the right words!..."

"We started to walk and then ran and they shoot at us. Some of us were wounded, my people too. My aunts were with me there. Later, when we had already reached the forest, the Germans caught up with us.

"I had a sister-in-law, my brother's wife, and she had children, well, the Germans told them to return here to the village. So they went back.

"I must've been about eighteen then. We, the young folk, went on but the rest were deceived into returning. But we ran deeper into the forest.

"They went back with their families, they had children with them. All our village folk. Well, and then... They locked them up in a dug-out. My sister-in-law I mean and her two kids... Later they drove them on beyond Dezhy, to where the quarries were. All those village folk who went back home. They made them undress and poured some liquid on them..."

"I went looking around for my sister-in-law. My sister went too. Two children... All we found was their clothes lying there. We recognized our family... I recognized my nephews' clothes. But the people had all been burned up. Their bodies lay all over the place. They're buried later. Well, you'd come and look — they were all burned up..."

"By the counts made, a hundred and twenty-five people were murdered here. In Kobylniki village next door, they burned everyone, to a man. Only two men who were at the front survived there.

"Yuzefovo used to be a large village before the war. But when we returned there after the raid we found only one woman and a couple of children left. All the rest were killed..."

Galina Ivanovna Cherevaka, 49-years-old. Yaskovichi Village, Soligorsk District, Minsk Region.

"...The execution squad arrived and began burning down the houses. As soon as they began burning them we all went out into the yard. They started with my mother-in-law's house. We went out into the yard and they began to shove us back into the house. The children clutched at my skirt, screaming away, while the Germans yelled at us:

"'Weg, weg!!' — ordered us all back into the house. 'You're all partisans, we'll destroy the lot of you!'

"There were three little houses on our farmstead. I had my three children with me and the baby in my arms.

"'Oh,' I says, 'we are done for, children!'

"The children are screaming at the top of their lungs. Then they began herding all the cattle. One of the boars managed to get away. They opened fire at that boar. My mind was a blank. I was in such a panic. Imagine, alone with those four kids. Well, they began shooting at that boar. When they opened fire my father-in-law fell behind the fence where they couldn't see him. While they were shooting at the boar we, too, made off and hid in the forest.

"The children had nothing on. They were shooting. I said: 'Fell down, children.' That's what they did.

"Not a soul was left on the farmstead. There was only one baby there whose mother they took to drive her cow. So my oldest son said:

"'Mother, let's take him along, too.'

"I said: 'Take him, if you'll carry him.'

"I already had my baby in my arms, a year and a half he was. One of my sons was three and another four. The eldest boy was six.

"In the forest we came across two other boys. When I entered the forest I was so glad to see fresh tracks.

"'Kolya, Adam,' I shouted, 'have you seen any people around?'

"I laid the children under a fir tree and we sat there for two days and nights. The first day they didn't ask for anything but the next day they began pleading:

"'Mother, auntie, we're hungry!...'

"Then they said:

"'Our granny baked so much bread for the partisans, it lay there on the porch. Isn't there any left?...'"

Alexandra Grigoryevna Glushanina, 45-years-old. Ikany Village, Borisov District, Minsk Region.

"A little girl was left at her side, she was just seven. She was only a child... When they ran in she began screaming and so they killed her.

"...As for her, there was something wrong with her legs and she couldn't walk. They came and poked at her legs and began to cover her with straw. After they had brought a heap of straw they walked off, set a fire burning in the yard, and began playing a harmonica. It began to get dark.

"Well, she thought, they're going to burn me...

"When it became a little dark she crawled to the fence, moved the boards apart and hid in the potato patch.

"They sent a police-dog after her, you know, a German shepherd. She pressed her face to her sheepskin coat so as not to breathe...

"After several minutes had passed they called back the dog, whistled for it.

"After that,' she said, 'I crawled into the bushes. It was quite dark now. I was afraid to stay there in the bushes so I lay right down at the edge of the field.'

"In the morning they began shooting again. They were now killing the Gorelovo villagers.

"I shouldn't have gone away from my folks, I'll be sure to die here,' she thought.

"But her life was spared, and she survived that day.

"That woman was my mother, Alyona Glushanina..."

Kopatsevichi

"...It all happened on February 11, 1943. The Germans came with some traitors to kill people. Before the war we had a machine-and-tractor station where the workers lived; wherever they found people there, in the street, or inside or wherever — they killed them on the spot. That machine-and-tractor station wasn't far from our place and we could hear them shooting. Afterwards they set their houses on fire. There was a lot of smoke around and we realized they were killing people there. Next they started firing at our village. Our people escaped to the forest any way they could — some by foot, others harnessed bulls — got away any way they could. It was towards dusk, at four or five in the afternoon perhaps. The Germans came, made the rounds of the village and on seeing there was nobody there, went off to the forest to find us.

"I had a child with me — he was a little over two years old — there was also my mother and my sister born in 'twenty-three. They didn't find us. They took some of the folks hiding in another part of the forest.

"They told those people: 'Go home! We've come to get the partisans but if you stay in the forest we'll find you anyway and then we'll kill you and burn down your houses. Those who stay home will live!'

"They spent the night here but the people still wouldn't trust them and refused to go back. Then they took off for Western Byelorussia. Our roads were very bad then. Soon they swooped back down on us — on horseback they were — and entered every house.

"We lived in the collective-farm nursery school, we got it temporarily. Fourteen Germans occupied the other half of the house. Settled down there and wouldn't let anyone out. We weren't to go out into the yard or anywhere. They set up machine-guns all around because they must have

already been planning to kill people.

"I said to my husband: 'Run for your life! Maybe they'll leave the women alone, but they'll certainly take the men and kill them!'

"He went out and was ordered back."

QUESTION: "Did they talk with you at all?"

"They came in carrying these grenades with wooden handles. They also had Russian vodka with them, in these hundred-gram bottles. They sat down and began drinking. They said to my husband: 'Come have a drink with us!'

"But he says: 'I don't want to.'

"And he said: 'Are you stupid or something that you don't want to try Russian vodka?'

"That's what he said, in Russian, honest. So I says: 'Go ahead, otherwise they'll kill you.'

"They had these bits of tin on their service caps, with skulls on them. That was their mark. They spoke Russian and Ukrainian. When they gulped down their vodka, one of them placed a mug on his head and another fired at it from the corner."

QUESTION: "He shot at it?"

"Yes, he was shooting right there in the house.

"I says: 'What are you doing? Don't you see the child is scared!'

"They stopped firing. I took a bucket to fetch some water. We used to get water from a well near the barn, where they shot the people later on. One of them came up to me and said in this hoarse voice: 'Put down that bucket!'

"'I won't,' I says.

"'Put it down!'

"'I won't.'

"Then he tugs at the bucket and says: 'Follow me.'

"'I'm not going anywhere,' I says.

"He grabs his revolver:

"'Don't you see who you're talking to? I'll give it to you so your head flies right off!'

"I began screaming. My old man came running out of the house and said:

"'What's going on here?'

"'Is this your wife?' he said.

"And he let me go.

"Soon after they all went out into the street and threw that grenade of theirs. They stayed for the night and in the morning — that was the fifteenth... True, there's something else I forgot to tell... In the evening one of them came in wearing a white smock with blood-stains. On that smock.

"And he says to me: 'Lass, wash this smock for me.'

"'The whole village has been burnt down and we haven't got any soap — there's no place to buy it...'

"But he says: 'I'll bring you some soap. Wash this smock for me, I'll need it tomorrow.'

"So willy-nilly I began washing that smock. After I was through I hung it over the stove and he sat down beside me.

"'You're a nice lass!' he said.

"Sort of cast me a glance and said it. I ask him: 'Where're you from?'

"'I'm Russian!'

"He had lived in Russia until some time before and then they exiled him, I forgot where.

"'I'm married,' he said. 'But now I can't go on living with my wife the way I used to. My nerves were wrecked by this war.'

"'Why were your nerves wrecked?' I asked.

"'Well, it's this war. We've all been through our share!'

"I thought he might answer my question so I asked: 'What's going to happen to us?'

"'Don't worry, we won't touch you. We'll just chase the partisans a bit but you'll stay put.'

"In the morning he dropped in for a second, grabbed his smock and was off again. I tell you, they were in a devil of a hurry! They got dressed

and all that lickety-split and rushed out into the street. We could see carts standing near the barn — it was some hundred metres away from us. When they dashed out of the house the carters at once began pulling a sledge out of the barn and leading out the horses. I saw it all out of the window, see. Me and my husband watched them for a while, and said they were going to kill people in that barn. We had to run away. He says: 'Let's go!'

"'Run off on your own,' I says.

"We went out back but when he took a few steps away from me one of them said:

"'Go back, buster, or I'll shoot!'

"But he walked on all the same. I waved my hand at him to run off! But that guy repeated: 'Come on back, or I'll kill you!'

"So he went back. We went back into the house. Our house, that nursery school, stood facing the street and we can see a crowd of people coming down the street. They're driving them along, driving them here, in our direction. There's a whole crowd of them — young and old, all kinds. We realized we had nowhere to go now. So far they hadn't occupied our house. They'd taken my sister to prepare food for them in another house. We said:

"'There's no hope left. Let's try to get away!'

"He smashed the window pane and the frame and said to me: 'I'll carry the boy and you follow me!'

"He was just going to jump out when I caught hold of him:

"'Stop,' I said. 'You won't make it, they have sentries posted all around!'

"But he said: 'Let's try it anyway. It's better to get a bullet in the back than stay!'

"I said: 'Let's tear down the ceiling.'

"We climbed on top of the stove, tore off the boards and he climbed above the ceiling. I handed

him our son and then climbed up there myself, into that attic. Our mother was walking to and fro about the house, so I say to her:

"Mother, climb up here, too."

"But she says: 'I won't.'"

"Meanwhile they had come up to the house already. It was too late to argue, see I asked her about five times and then we closed up the hole and remained up there in the attic. My husband says: 'Do you think it's any good to stay up here? It's not at all safe. Let's run away!'"

"But I says: 'There's no place to run.'"

"Do you want to burn here alive? Or else they'll find us and torture us to death. Is that any better?"

"All right then,' I says. 'You can run off yourself. At least you will be left alive!'"

"He says: 'I'll run away and I'll at least know where you've been killed so I can come and bury you.'"

"So we parted. He crawled back through that hole, climbed out the window and was off. For the next five minutes or so all was quiet, then I heard single shots and then a tommy-gun. That's the end, I thought, he didn't get through. I'd refused to give him our son, he stayed with me."

"There was a break in the shooting after they had killed everyone in the old part of the village, before they brought along the people from the new part. Then they herded in a new group of villagers and those tommy-gunners fired away again. I looked at it all through a crack in the wall and tried to frighten my boy: I held him up so he could see what was going on and says: 'If you make any noise, they'll kill you. See how they're killing all those people. Our auntie's been killed and our granny, and so will you!'"

"He was only two, but he didn't utter a sound."

"They killed everyone in the new part of the village, too. Then they came along carrying

a flask. I don't know what it was they had in there but the fact is they poured some liquid over the barn and set it on fire. Then they returned to the nursery school. The neighbour had a mandolin, and they played it a bit and drank some more. I was in the attic while they danced down below, stamping their feet. Then one of them walked out and said: 'Harness the horse!'"

"And they drove off to Zaglinnoye. Some of them went, not all. That same day, it was the sixteenth of February, they killed Zaglinnoye!"

"Those others spent the night here and in the morning began to thoroughly burn the village, taking away the cattle and everything they wanted. They approached the nursery school. I'd thought I'd run away at night. It had thawed during the day but froze at night. I could hear the sentries walking around and the snow crunching under their feet. If I'd been alone I would have crawled away but as it was I was afraid I might wake up the child and he would start crying. So they came up to the nursery school. The nursery was roofed with shingles. They set fire to the village by shooting incendiary bullets. But those shingles just wouldn't burn. We had some flax lying around in the hallway — so they shot at that flax. It started to smoke and such a smoke screen came up through that hole, that I knew I was going to burn alive there. So I crawled back down into the house through the hole and made for the window. As I was climbing out the window I saw my little son's coat had already caught fire."

"When I reached the forest I began to look for traces of people. I thought there was not a living soul left, that everyone had been killed. I cried and called out. It seemed to me in my fear that there was nobody left in the world, that everyone else had been killed. I can't even tell how long I walked around like that..."



Ganna Gritsevich
Volga Vederka





The "Novoye Polesye" State Farm

"The shed is already ablaze. The roof has burnt down, only the eaves remained. Bits of fire fall on me... And I had that big scarf. I spent all my strength trying to climb out and couldn't manage—at least five bodies were on top of me... My little girl, she wasn't five yet, cried out: 'Mummy, oh Mummy' and was gone..."

From Avdotya Gritsevich's story. In the picture she is shown with her daughter-in-law and her grand-daughter. Kopatsevichi Village, Soligorsk District, Minsk Region

This is **Ganna Mikhailovna Gritsevich's** account of how the Germans razed the Polesye village of Kopatsevichi in Soligorsk District, Minsk Region.

During the trial in Minsk of those participated in punitive expeditions as part of the Dirlewanger SS battalion, shooting and burning to death Byelorussian villagers, one of these butchers recalled how it was for him "the first time".

"The Germans and our guys were drawn up in two lines after we entered the village. As I remember it, the Germans stood in front and we behind them. The officer through an interpreter (I can't remember his name) ordered us to obey all the commands of the German soldiers, those who don't, he added, will be shot. Each German told the one standing behind him to follow him into a cottage. When two men had stopped by every cottage, a German and one of us, the officer gave a command and we walked in. I entered the fifth or sixth house together with one of the Germans. All in all there were twenty-five or thirty

households in that village. I was the first to enter the house and I saw an old man and an old woman, they were both about seventy, sitting at the table. A boy of about fifteen sat next to them. The German signed me to shoot the three of them. I pulled the trigger three times, shot each of them once. I shot at point-blank range and they fell to the floor.

"After that the German fired a round at them with his submachine-gun and he said: 'Kaput!'"

"The end, finished!" the nazi said of those killed. But his words applied to his aid, too, because it was the end of him as well. From that moment there was one man less in the world and one more nazi brute!

Kopatsevichi was once a large village. Life has changed there today.

But it sometimes happens that the past lets itself be remembered in the person of a former polizei who is brought from somewhere and shown to the villagers:



"I gave 30 rubles each to the two policemen for doing a good job against the partisans..."

From a report of the commander of a company of the 7th police regiment "Centre"



"Do you recognize this man?"

In some villages people would come running up to our jeep, firing questions: "Where are they?", "Who?", "We heard some more polizeis were brought in."

After escaping the partisan bullets and the wrath of the people, some of them lived in fear for some twenty-five or even thirty years. Such a man might have lived among the people with his family, but one wonders what good children and a loving wife — those usual tokens of joy and happiness — meant to him. *After all, they knew nothing about his past!* Of no account were his hard work and good earnings and also his name, perhaps even respected by those with whom he had worked all these years — he had naturally tried to put on a good face before those who tomorrow might suddenly *learn the truth!*

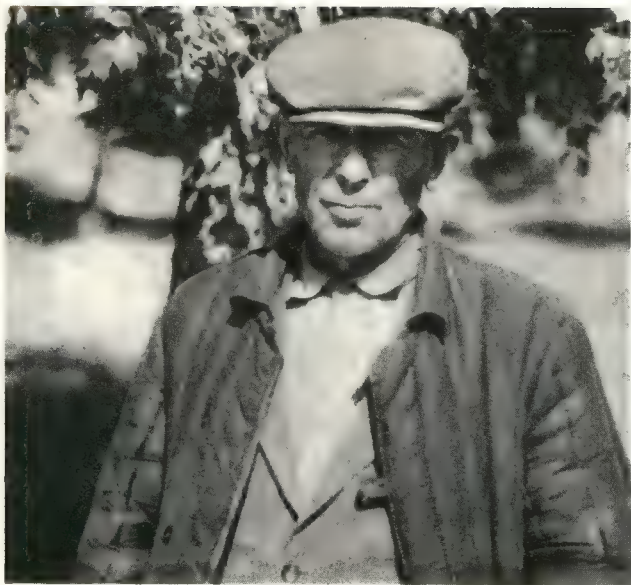
How this possibility horrified him! Fancy all his acquaintances and his children learning that he was a member of the dreaded execution squads, a murderer of innocent women and children!

"We both, my mother and I entered the shed. There was a real heap of bodies lying there, but it was hard to tell whether they were people or just a pile of sacks.

"One family I saw standing in the hallway, begging for mercy. Meanwhile they were shooting down another family. The man was a strapping fellow. He had a child in his arms and when they fired, the child went flying out of his arms. They fired at him once more in the back of the head and he fell down. Those other people were still pleading in the hallway.

"I stood there watching. A German was standing opposite me holding a revolver — just a little way off, like from me to where you're sitting. My arms hung limp while he moved backwards, farther and farther away from me... I would probably have been done for if he'd opened fire then. But he just backed farther and farther away and I went on standing there with my arms like this (*shows how*), and then I fell down. I fell so I wouldn't see anything anymore..."

(From the account of **Volga Stepanovna Vederko** from Kopatsevichi Village.)



Mikolai Rudenya

During his trial, one of the former members of an execution squad recalled how his son once said while watching a TV film: "I would've killed them with my own hands!" referring to the nazi executioners. The man swung his fist at the boy. He was badly drunk – that is how his wife and children accounted for his strange behaviour. But later they were to learn the truth...

Many of the accused cursed their former instructors and commanders. Cursed their führers, big and small – their company and platoon commanders, Pohl and Plätz, Zimmermann and Salski, their battalion commanders, Siegling and Dirlwanger. Higher up the hierarchy, above all these were the police general Gottberg and the head executioners – the Himmlers and Hitlers.

However, the accused, though only executors of their commanders' orders, can hardly be considered "small fry" if we take into account the atrocities they participated in. Those were anything but petty crimes they committed together with their Plätzes and Sieglings!

Here is an excerpt from the account of **Kuzma Lukyanovich Agiyevich** from Kopatsevichi Village.

"'You the master of the house?'"

"'Yes,' I said."

"'And where is your woman?'"

"'How should I know?'"

"'Take your children and follow me!'"

"We had two two-year-olds and a baby who was just six months old. We also had an older lad who was eight. My wife had sent him along to the polizei's father. Said to him: 'You might survive so at least save my child!'"

"He wasn't a neighbour of ours, he was just passing by, and he had a son the same age as our boy and they were pals."

"The moment they told me to take along the children I understood that our end was near. I asked them how I could possibly carry all three children. But they just stopped two women in the street and handed them a child each, while I carried the third, and they drove us forward."

"On the way one of them called out to me..."

You see, I had a pair of good leather boots on. He called me forth from that crowd of people and led me into a nearby house. He ripped the boots off and gave me a pair of factory-made galoshes instead.

"You'll make it in these just as well!" he said.

"Then he took me back to where the rest of the people were.

"They herded us to the square, where the monument now stands, and there on that square they began to form groups of five or three people and take them to a cowshed nearby. Uh-huh. One of them stood in the cowshed and shot people down.

"When my turn came I was also led to the shed and was wounded..."

QUESTION: "Could you see the man who was going to shoot you when you were led in?"

"Why not? He's standing there, giving orders:

"Next one, next, next!"

"And there are dead bodies lying all over the place.

"The moment I moved away from the wall he fired his tommy-gun — tra-ta-ta!

"But I dodged and the bullet merely grazed the skin on my head... I fell to the ground. The child I was holding was killed on the spot. As for the others — I didn't know what had come of them. My oldest son was now with me, too, for they had brought the polizei's father in there, too, and shot him dead with all the rest. So my boy was now at my side.

"Well, I lay there... four more bullets hit me. All in all I was wounded five times in that shed. But none of the bullets hit bone, they all ended up in the flesh.

"Well, we lay there until they had killed all those people and walked out.

"Well, some of the older children survived. They, you know, got to their feet and said:

"Look, there's nobody left!"

"We recognized their voices so I half rose. Another man also got up:

"Are you alive?" he asked.

"Looks like it," I said.

"Can you run?"

"I think I can," I said.

"Well, we got up and ran off barefoot. I left my galoshes behind. I ran some three kilometres in the snow barefoot. Some women and that man I told you about followed me. One of the women later gave me her galoshes. She was wearing a pair of felt boots with the galoshes over them; and another gave me a skirt, which I wrapped about my feet under the galoshes. Then we went on.

"We spent the night outside.

"There were nineteen of us who got out the shed alive."

QUESTION: "And how many were killed in there?"

"They killed four hundred and twenty-six people.

"Some of the men tried to escape but were shot on the run.

"They are also included in that figure..."

How bewildered and frightened one of the former executioners was when, now considerably aged and flabby, he was brought to modern Kopatsevichi and recognized by **Mikolai Ivanovich Rudenya**.

"So your turn has come at last, doesn't it?" he said to the murderer. "Remember what I told you when you shoved me toward that German who was doing the shooting: 'It'll be your turn some day, too!'"

"They took up quarters in houses occupied by

small families and spent that night there," tells Mikolai Rudenya. "None of them stopped at my place. But they put up at my neighbour's. They only used my barn for their horses. My brother and his family were living with me then, so they just left their horses with me. My brother's house was all locked up, and my house was packed as it was with two families."

QUESTION: "What did they say to the people that evening?"

"What they talked about I don't know, for I wasn't there myself. Well, what did they do — they looked around trying to find something to do... To catch some young girl... Such things happened, of course... They did it. Raped girls, I mean..."

"When the women lighted the stoves to cook breakfast, they began to round up the villagers.

"They did it in the following way:

"They said they were merely going to check our passports.

"You see, we had passports at that time, sure enough. But what passports were they talking about when they told us to bring along the little ones, too!... No, it wasn't passports they wanted, we could tell that at once!

"Six of them or so walked into my house to drive us out. I had three daughters. One was a little over six, another was two and the smallest was only a month old. My father, who was seventy-five, also lived with us. So there was my wife, my father and I. They drove us out and along to the street where the monument now stands. Those who had good boots on were ordered to take them off, they would lead them into a house and tear their boots off.

"Well, they brought us back to where the rest of the people were crowding and, you know, one of them allowed the father of a polizei — his son worked in the German police — to get his family

out of that crowd. Well, when he began to pull them out of the crowd — nobody wants to die!... By that time they were already shooting and people were screaming in the shed... He got out a whole bunch of people.

"But when they saw how many there were they ordered him and all of them back into the crowd..."

QUESTION: "Did he try to save some of his neighbours, too?"

"Of course! Everyone was begging him and he knew them all well. They all hoped they might take them for his relatives and they would survive. But they were made to go back... They took people in groups of four, five or six. As a rule, they went by families..."

"When they led me away... They had already taken my father and killed him. And when they took me to the shed, one of them — now he's been caught and put on trial — pushed me hard on the shoulder with the barrel of his rifle. And when I said: 'It'll be your turn some day, too!' and he swore at me in my own language, I realized he was a Russian... But they all wore German uniforms with these skulls... It was a punitive detachment, in short. When they shoved me into that shed and ordered me to lie down I happened to lie right atop of my father. They placed you so your head would be on top. After they'd made us lie down they began shooting. Two bullets hit my head, a third grazed me here (*shows the place*) — it is still there now. I lay on my side and kept my left eye open watching them to see what would happen. When they had shot everyone down they began to inspect the bodies. They finished off many people then, especially kids. They'd cry themselves:

"'Finish us off!'

"People were screaming and swearing — all sorts of things were going on there. While they were passing through there was blood all around, and they all got smeared with blood. One of our

lads tried to get out — Kuzma Agievich's nephew (*here points to a man*), but as soon as he rose to his feet they shot him dead.

"Well, I lay still while they checked whether I was dead. They returned and one of them hit me hard on the leg. Then he began to listen and when he heard me breathe he fired three more times but missed. He shot and listened again... He bent very low...

"Then they said something to each other, brought in a bottle with some liquid in it and began to pour it over the shed. Then they left. And a sentry stood guard at the other end.

"It was then that Kuzma got to his feet to dash off. He was lucky to have been wounded only in the flesh. I rose, too, then, but couldn't run.

"We dashed out into the street and the sentry

cried: 'Stop!' He fired into the air and then hid someplace.

"Well, we ran for the forest. I stumbled on a ways, fell down and got to my feet again until finally I reached the bushes. Here I sat down to have a little rest and eat some bread. Then I rose again and floundered on to where the haystacks stood and fell into last year's hay...

"When her present husband (*he points at Ganna Gritsevich*) went looking for who had been left alive, he found me and a partisan dressed my wounds and took me to a forest dug-out."

QUESTION: "So you reminded him of all that? That man who shoved you with his barrel..."

"Yes, I said: 'So your turn has come at last?' What can he say now? He just stared at me..."

Razlitye

Razlitye is a tiny forest village in Borisov District, Minsk Region. Here we taped the following account by **Yulia Fyodorovna Sushko**, a single woman of sixty-three.

"I saw five of their trucks drive into the village — I myself lived at the other end. Then some of them got out and ran down the road and the rest ran toward the forest.

"I was going to hide in the bushes with my daughter. My husband had joined the partisans. He had just returned from the Finnish war a year before when the new war started, and he was taken into a partisan unit...

"We were going to hide in the rye when this German came running our way shouting: 'Go to the headman, to the elder's!'

"We knew, of course, where the elder lived, but I took my daughter by the hand and led her off — not to the elder's place but to a collective-farm building site. One of the Germans, though, chased us away. One was standing there, right in the middle of the street, the rest of them surrounded us on all sides with machine-guns.

"Then I says: 'Women, let's go and beg them to have mercy on us!'

"We went up to them and said: 'Kind sirs, are you really going to kill us? We are not to blame for the partisans and all that...'

"And they said: 'You are going to be burned alive. And there is nothing we can do to help you.

"We couldn't tell whether they were polizeis or Ukrainians.

"Bow low to the Kommandant. Fall on your knees in front of him.'

"Which of them is the Kommandant?' I asked.

"The one in the cape, standing there among the people,' he replied.

"We came up to the Kommandant:

"Kind sir,' we said, 'are you going to kill us all?'

"All of you kaputt!' he yelled.

"And he ordered them to open the doors of the barn.

"My mother was standing right by that shed. I'll run and tell her the Germans are going to burn us alive, I thought. By that time they had already opened the doors of the shed. We'll be the first to be burned, I thought.

"Then people began scattering in different directions and they started mowing them down with their machine-guns.

"I ran out of the crowd beyond the bushes. I was wounded by an explosive bullet, it tore up all my flesh here.

"I bandaged the wound with my kerchief. And two Germans are standing there.

"Sirs!' I said, 'finish me off, I can't bear it!' (*She bursts into tears.*)

"But they said: 'Go into the bushes, go into the bushes!'

"I go as if in a fever and to make things worse the neighbour's daughter fell right on my feet.

"Volka,' I say, 'I can't step over you.'

"She'd been hit in the head... I went into the bushes and there my eight-year-old daughter joined me. My other girl was wounded in the leg. Some fifteen children managed to slip away and several women. All the rest were shot dead.

"When my daughter saw the blood streaming from me she took their kerchiefs from those girls who had gotten away and immediately started to bandage me up... She dug a little hole in the ground to get me some water...

"In the evening three more women joined us.

"Later some partisans carried me away. They found some peasant coat someplace, spread it on the stretcher and carried me away. The partisans

did. They laid me down there in the shrubs. There was no other place, for everything had been burnt to ashes. There were swarms of mosquitoes! I lay there for three days and got infested with worms. (*Bursts into tears.*) My old father came with a cart and drove me away to the village where he lived. I stayed in bed for days. My father went and brought some iodine and other medicines and sent for Manka, who now works as a doctor. We had twelve metres of long bandage, so she told us to wash off the dirt with that clean bandage...

"Our whole family was killed. We were three sisters, I alone was left without even a kerchief to put over my head.

"There were forty-eight households in the village and about a hundred and eighty people — they were all killed. Four women and two men were left. One of the men hid in the barley and the other jumped into a well. At first he tore off the log frame and thrust it inside, and then he jumped down on top of it so as not to drown. And those who were carters survived, too, my old father among them.

"But they're all dead now...

"The Germans bayoneted little babies...

"Later when our Army passed through these parts they were captured. They were well guarded. We went to have a look and found them sitting by the fire... Prisoners!

"We said to them: 'What if we threw you into the fire the way you did our children!'

"And they moved farther off from the fire..."

Later in the very same house, **Nastasya Zmitrovna Shilo** told us the same story as she had seen it happen. She was a woman of seventy-six, tall, stern and loud-voiced like some prophet. Yet every once in a while as she talked, she would

break into a nervous laugh. That is how she began — with that rather awesome laugh of hers.

"Ha-ha-ha! In order, you say? I know what you mean. We had investigators here before you...

"Well, here is how it was... People said some trucks were blown up about five kilometres away from our village and later a turncoat was killed on the road. The Germans found us in our hiding place in the forest, by the riverside. That was the first time they encircled us. They brought that dead turncoat into the village and told us to bury him. Some of our old men made a coffin and covered it with white fabric.

"Then they stood around by the coffin and said: 'Two hundred of your people will answer for this.' Those turncoats said that. I was standing there myself. There were lots of people in the street and I heard them say it. Upon my word!

"A plane landed here, near Sinichino village. Actually there were two but I'll count them as one. All of our men were taken away to work as carters. They took my old man, too. I remained alone with the children. There were five children. I didn't sleep nights and was on my feet all day...

"Then they come to kill us. I got up. Seven trucks had come. People thought for some reason that they were going to take us away to Germany. One of my boys was already a big lad.

"So I say: 'Well, children, let's get going, it looks like they're going to take us away to Germany or kill us!'

"I laid my eldest son together with the little ones and went to fetch some water. The women, my neighbours, said: 'We are done for!'

"'Don't you worry, women,' I said, 'They occupied Sayokh and didn't kill anyone.'

"That's what I told those women. And they walked away.



"Later, when our army passed through these parts, they were captured."





Yulia Sushko

“Then a German stopped me while I was on the way to Marila, my sister. He caught up with me shouting: ‘Kaput, kaput!’

“I walked on but by that time they had rounded up the whole village. Some of our people were crying, and I was together with this here Yulia. (*She points at Yulia Sushko, the mistress of the house.*) One of them stood there leaning on his rifle... All of our village folk were already there. My children as well. All five of them had come to me. I put my arms around them like this – they were so small – but my eldest boy tore away from me and ran off! He escaped to the cemetery. He somehow got through, called another boy and escaped somehow. Well, the other four children were by my side.

“Yulia went up to one of the Germans and said: ‘Sir, are they going to kill us off or what?’

“‘What are you talking to that blockhead for?’

I said. ‘Look at him standing there. Won’t say a word.’

“So we turned away from him.

“Then I saw a car was already standing there and six of them were standing by. And wearing these big capes and black mittens...

“We came up a little closer but I thought: I won’t go farther otherwise they’ll kill me.

“Our headman (*laughs*) ... or village elder, the devil knows what they called him – well, he wanted to go away with them. But they spat upon him, wouldn’t take him along – he had too many children... That elder, Levon, was the first to be killed.

“I saw him fall down and didn’t try to come any closer. Then I saw all our people starting to run, so I, too, ran across the field. Ran down the street and into the rye. Two of us ran together, my sister-in-law and I. Then she fell down and lay still. I just glanced at her... Can you believe it? I’m not

lying – I saw her lying there and ran on, I squeezed through the fence, and hid behind some small sheds. That's how I survived. I ran past three yards and behind the cowsheds. It was thick with buildings there.

"Then I saw my little girl, she was only this big, running along. She was running out of the rye.

"The firing was now less frequent. And I said to my daughter: 'My darling girl, we are done for!'

"And where are the four other children?...

"I took my girl in one arm and her padded jacket in the other and made off into the rye. The child was all black from lying in the furrow.

"I lay hiding with her in the rye while the shooting went on.

"Did they ever shoot! Oh, how they shot! The forest echoed and the earth groaned with the shooting! People hid wherever they could.

"How many of us managed to get away? Only two women. Otherwise only children. When they fired their machine-guns the bullets passed over the little ones and they survived. Those who were about five or six.

"I was in good health then, so I managed to get away, but I wouldn't have made it now..."

QUESTION: "What happened to your children?"

"Four of my children were lost somewhere, only one of them was with me, my youngest daughter. They, the Germans, stayed there in the village for a long time.

"I crawled a little closer to the edge of the field to take a look and she cried: 'Mummy, don't leave me here!'

"I moved a little closer and saw my house on fire, burning up to the windows! I also saw the Germans had gone. Then I ran back and found ... found Kristina. They had killed her little

daughter as she held her in her arms. I found Kulya Tsiganova, and a little girl, Shura. That was all that was left of us!

"We all made for the forest.

"I walked calling out to the children and then I found her lying there wounded... (*Turns to the mistress of the house.*) You were lying there, Yulia, and I found you. There were four children at her side... And all this mud around!

"'Who's there?' I said. 'Come over here!'

"But they said: 'You come over here!'

"They were only little girls after all. So I came up.

"This Yulia here was lying there, barely alive. I bent over and said: 'Yulia, dear!'

"She heard me and started to sob. And her little girl took a handful of mud and splashed it on her. There was a puddle of water there – mostly mud. The girl was a little over six and when her mother Yulia started muttering all sorts of nonsense she poured some of that muddy water on her. Trying to save her. She dug a little hole and scooped up water out of it. Yulia was lying there naked so she would pour water over her breasts and face..."

Razlitye is a village with no prospects for the future. That is what we were told by officials at two levels: in the village Soviet and in the district centre.

The women living in these sorry cottages were given the choice to move to the centre of the collective farm and were, naturally, guaranteed help in resettling. But they refused the offer.

Does it seem strange? No, not really.

Several years before we encountered a similar situation in Grodno Region. Actually things were far worse there – one old woman was still living in a chimneyless cottage where the smoke from the stove escaped through a special little window.

This wasn't in a museum or in a picture but in Lida District, on the territory of a prosperous state farm called Maloye Mozheikovo. The state farm had built a two-storey house but nobody could convince the old woman to move into a new flat with all modern conveniences. The farm director wrote a letter to her son in Leningrad promising to take care of his travelling expenses if only the young man succeeded in convincing his mother not to be so stubborn... It sounds like a fairy-tale to someone who is not too trusting. And what was the reason for the old woman's refusal? There was an old linden growing in front of her window with a spring under it... That is how the old woman herself explained her behaviour.

Razlitye now consists of three cottages, a few sheds, fences and vegetable gardens... Not even

the gorgeous summer can make up for this sad sight. Nastasya Shilo's daughter took her old mother to Kazakhstan, where she herself works as a book-keeper, but the old woman was not in her element there. She is still living in the village with Yulia Sushko who treats her as she would her own mother. There are no apparent reasons for such strong attachment to their native parts. Both the mothers and their cottages age with the years. The log frame above the well in which one of the two escaped men hid years ago has again rotted away and chunks and dust from it keep falling into the shallow well with its suspicious-looking water.

"Tomorrow will be exactly thirty years since" her dear boy was killed and she will go to his grave and "weep there the whole day"...

That is why she will not move anywhere from Razlitye, that is why she would not stay with her daughter in newly-opened fertile lands.

Memory

There was once a small village in Slutsk Region called Podlevishche. It was a handsome village with spacious farmyards and shingled cottages on high foundations surrounded by a wreath of orchards. The collective farm here soon began to prosper and the village was given a new, Soviet name Krasnaya Storonka.

In those distant days Kondrat Lapets planted a birch tree in his courtyard, for no practical purpose, just for beauty's sake. He delighted in its loveliness, unaware that it would soon become a sort of memorial on his grave...

On January 28, 1943, punitive detachments attacked Krasnaya Storonka, Gandarevo, Starevo, Lazarev Bor and other villages in the vicinity, big and small. They burnt down the villages, took the young people away to Germany and killed the old folks. Ivan Lapets, Kondrat's son, who was a messenger for the partisans, returned to his fire-ravaged house to find his father dead and buried him under the birch tree near the yard according to the age-old manner of burying those killed by lightning. After the war Ivan built himself a house across the street and the old farmstead remains uninhabited. His father's birch tree seeded other young birches, which surrounded Lapets' grave. The tombstone placed by his son is hidden among these living memorials.

In Kazimirovka village, Mozyr District, an elderly olive-skinned woman with big eyes, the kind they used to draw on old Russian icons, took us to a grey stone which stood under an apple tree in the vegetable garden. Here was the grave of her entire family, tortured to death by the nazis. Ulyana Kazak told us about the tragic end of her dear ones and about her own narrow escape with amazing reserve and consistency though she had warned us beforehand that sometimes her mind goes blank. While we were taking picture of her by the apple tree she stood there calmly as if she

weren't seeing us and then she gathered a few fallen apples from the grass and handed them to us to eat. There was something unsettling about this offer of food over the bodies of the murdered people. But there seemed to be nothing odd about it to our cordial host, a peasant woman with withered hands darkened by hard work. Those who were buried here had planted the apple tree and now it preserved their memory with its sunny fruit.

Some time before we saw several scorched oak trees in the yards of what used to be the village of Tupichitsy on the shore of Bobrovitskoye Lake, in the Brest Polesye. Little remained of these ancient oaks — only those of them that grew on the outskirts of the village farther away from the ravaging fire retained some vital strength in their thick trunks, under the armour of their bark. The fire ruined their branches and ate out black hollows in their trunks and so they gape with their scorched cavities, amazing people during the day and frightening them at night. The burnt arms of their branches, their scorched leg-roots and their trunk-bodies lend their silhouettes an air of tragic majesty.

But this is not the main thing.

The Tupichitsy oaks became memorials not merely because they were committed to the flames and shared the tragic fate of the people who perished here. It is the worship of those who are alive today and their memory that turned these silent trees into memorials. The people who were left, who survived by some miracle, and those who moved into the village from places near and far to settle on the opposite shore of the lake in Bobrovichi village, as well as their children who were born after the war, pay homage to the Tupichitsy oaks as they would to the memory of their ancestors. It does not enter anybody's mind to approach these veteran oaks with a saw or axe in hand.



Krasnaya Storonka. At
Ivan Lapets's Farmstead

Dalva



Rassokha



It is for people that man creates memorials. And it does not really matter what these memorials are made of — live green trees, hard granite, bronze and concrete, or even a resounding word or elevated melody which can convey memories and thoughts about life, death and eternity just as good as granite.

These memorial trees are at one and the same time touching, frightening and soothing; they elevate the soul. We human beings see them as the earth's protest, the voice of Mother Nature rising against blind cruelty. And in this innermost protest lies the pacification of our soul — for Nature itself supports us against death, it speaks out for humanity.

Alongside these memorial trees stand man-made monuments — commemorative plaques, obelisks, crosses, requiems, elegies, epitaphs, folk legends, epic tales and reminiscences — all of them asserting the triumph of life and human dignity over death and degradation.

In the middle of a large glade overgrown with pines a grand-looking memorial sparkles in the sun like a white marvel. The village of Rassokha once stood here, one of the many "partisan capitals" in Byelorussia and far from the only such "forest Moscow" here in Osipovich District, Mogilyov Region. First there were houses here, then dug-outs, a partisan cemetery and a cemetery for civilians killed by the enemy during various blockades. The enemy destroyed both the dug-outs and the signs hurriedly put up by people over the graves of their dear ones. When the blockades were lifted those who remained alive would return to Rassokha to restore the old burial mounds and make new ones. When the war was over relatives erected concrete or even granite obelisks with photographs on enamel medallions over the graves of the nazis' victims. Young girls and boys smile down at us from these home-made, naive

obelisks. At their age it would seem much more natural for them to come together, form a ring, build a fire and start singing. But there is nothing around but the forest and the subdued rustle of the pine trees...

Perhaps those who ordered this grand memorial on the site of the former village of Rassokha and those who actually made it wanted all these Soviet people, once so gay and full of life — these guys and gals, partisans, and the village men and women who during the war offered them shelter, washed and mended their clothes, fed them and were anxious for their lives — to communicate with the living. And they do talk and listen to those who are alive...

But what strikes one most about all these monuments are the names of the victims. Columns of identical names are engraved on the stone slabs ... ten, twenty, forty ... all one and the same! What words can be added to those names? This, however, is something you notice later when the emotions aroused by this white memorial standing in the midst of a remote forest, fade away.

At the foot of a hillock there is a simple staircase leading up to a terrace with five square, symmetrically arranged, cement memorial tablets covered with basreliefs and inscriptions. On the central slab two broad-shouldered young partisans are depicted defending a woman and her little son from the enemy. They stand on the alert, rifle in hand, looking in different directions — the enemy might appear from any side. One of the youths has clenched a fist... Although at times the partisans were powerless to defend their families and other civilians in battle zones, they did all they could — sounding the alarm, engaging in battles, giving shelter to those who survived, providing medical aid to the sick and wounded. They felt strongly that it was their duty to save people and the people themselves had an equally strong

feeling that their fates were linked with the partisans', their defenders and avengers.

It is, perhaps, most affecting when man in his natural desire to pay homage to his dear ones finds a common language with Nature, sensing its readiness to serve as a memorial to the people who, while they were alive, daily associated with it in their labour. The Lithuanian sculptor Gediminas Jokubonis acutely perceived the strength of the working man's bond with Nature. He assembled his famous memorial in the village of Pirčiupiai out of granite boulders taken right from the surrounding field. The sculptor set up five tiers of giant boulders and carved from them an unforgettable image of a Mother, a Lithuanian peasant woman, simple and majestic in her sorrow, and steadfast in her grief.

In Byelorussia, too, the Mother is a frequent image on the common graves of people murdered by the nazis. It is a most expressive image, for it vitally connects man's and Nature's protest against death. No matter how the figure of the Mother is executed — with professional skill in bronze, granite or marble, as, for instance, in Zasovye village, Logoisk District, or on the site of the fire-ravaged village of Perekhody in Slutsk District — or with amateur naiveness and ingenuousness, like the modest concrete figure put up in Lozky, Kalinkovich District — the very presence of this image at these memorable, sorrowful sites tugs at one's heart-strings.

Logoisk District. Across the road from the village of Zhardezhi an overgrown forest road branches off from the Minsk-Vitebsk highway and leads to what used to be the village of Dalva. Here, in spots where the pine wood gives way to sunlit glades which must once have been a field, there lie heaps of stones along both sides of the road. Polished by the wind, they look like huge potatoes. The area is quiet and overgrown with

forests. The pine trees resemble a company of soldiers who have descended the hillocks in formation and stopped short as if on command.

The temporary camp where the Dalva residents hid from the nazis in June 1944 lay in just such a thicket.

If you walk deeper into the grove you will get the feeling you are inside a gigantic organ whose silver pipes are the pine trunks overgrown with soft silver-grey lichen. Above the deep green of the berry bushes the bottoms of the trunks have a silvery tinge, while higher up, above man's height, the silver gradually turns to copper. All this is crowned by a dark vault of dense tree-tops. It seems that beauty, safety and repose have merged for ever in these lovely groves.

In June 1944 the front-line moved close to these parts, and the nazis set up a blockade... Villagers from Dalva, warned by the partisans, escaped into the forest. But the Germans won the battle on the road and came pouring into the partisan zone.

Mikolai Petrovich Girilovich, the only Dalva resident who survived the attack, told us how it all happened. He is a radio engineer today but in those bygone days he was an ordinary village boy.

"They would stop for the night and dig in, and by day would start combing the forest again.

"In the morning Dad went to graze the horse some two kilometres away from the village. My mother woke me up to spell him there and even took me to the place herself. Both mother and father then went home. After a while, as I was grazing the horse, I heard firing and sounds of explosions coming from the village. At first I began unhobbling the horse — it was hobbled with metal wires. I fussed about for a while and



At Yablonka farmstead

then gave up and ran off to the village without the horse. The first thing I saw was Vasily Kukharvonok's house — most of it had already burnt down. I ran across the field of rye to my house; the Hitlerites were already boarding their trucks and making off for Zhardezhi. I dashed into our house. The moment I stepped over the threshold I saw the bedding scattered all over the place and the spoons lying on the table... I felt so awfully scared that I began screaming and calling out for mother and father but nobody answered. Then I ran to the burning house. The fire had by now spread to the neighbouring cottages. I ran around calling out, asking for help ... but there was not a soul anywhere. All was quiet but for the crackling of the fire...



This has been left as a reminder of the war

"Then I ran back to where the horse was, unhobbled it and returned to the village on horseback. Almost all of Dalva had burnt to ashes. The fire stopped only by the linden trees. I looked round once more — nobody was to be seen. So I made my way to the summer camp, our hiding-place. The only person I found there was a man from Krutaya Gora. He was awfully scared at my coming but when I called out to him he said he was from Pleshchenitsy and had run away from the Germans. We spent the night together in a dug-out and when morning came the two of us made for the village of Stanovishche. I found some of my relatives there and we went to Dalva together. It was then that I saw they had burned all the villagers — I saw the burned bodies..."



Britsalovich

This happened exactly ten days before these parts were liberated. With the help of Soviet soldiers people from the neighbouring villages dug in the ashes of Kukharyonok's house and found the bodies and bones of forty-four Dalva villagers in the cellar under the house and underneath the broken bricks. The pre-war collective-farm chairman Pyotr Girilovich, the father of thirteen-year-old Mikolai, and the boy's mother were also among the corpses.

At the time they fenced off the common grave with poles; after the war was over the Prusevichi Village Soviet put up a metal fence around it and the state farm set up an obelisk on the site. When we were there in June 1973, we watched a new memorial being erected.

A monumental statue of Mother and Child now rises high above the vast glade where Dalva once stood and over the calm green landscape all around.

We saw Vladimir Terebun, a graduating student of the Minsk Theatre Arts College who sculpted the memorial, painstakingly engrossed in his task. He was helped by Tolya Yankovsky, a ninth-grader from the neighbouring village of Okolovo, and by Mikolai Girilovich who had come from Minsk on his day off.

Mikolai Girilovich told us that the idea of building a memorial here belonged to the Komsomol members at the Okolovo school and to the Byelorussian State Radio and Television Committee where he himself works. The Logoisk District

Komsomol Committee raised the necessary funds. Even schoolchildren from Saratov, who had once been here on an excursion, made their contribution to the building of the memorial.

Its author, a modest and reserved young man, explained that the image of the Mother had no prototypes. When we later recalled our conversation we felt sorry that the young sculptor had never met old Filimenya Tsvirka from the village of Staverio in Slutsk District, which was also burnt to ashes. With a bold and open expression of a truthful person, this tall woman seemed to be a living memorial when she eulogized the killed villagers, as if reciting an ancient epic.

"How many partisans we fed here and how many times we went on reconnaissance ourselves! We used to live in dire poverty and it was we who established the very first collective farm here and our Soviet power. And we had already begun to live well. But one villain ruined our men here in 'thirty-seven. Their sons, our children... how many of them became partisans and how many of them brave lads got killed..."

Old Filimenya talked about the need to put up a good memorial on the graves of the Starevo partisans and other residents but it never entered her head that at this moment she herself could serve as a prototype for such a monument.

Mass tragedies call for mass involvement in comprehending and preserving the memory of what happened.

The small Lithuanian village of Ablinga comes to mind here. Dalva was one of the last Soviet villages to be destroyed by the defeated and retreating enemy. Ablinga was one of the first Soviet settlements whose population was exterminated by the nazi butchers. It happened on June 23, 1941, the second day of the war. Of course, at that time there was not a single partisan here.

A book written by West-German war experts in

the early 1950s propounds the selfsame nazi myth: "The actions of the partisans were the reason for the Germans' initial lenience giving way to hatred."¹⁸ There were no partisans in Ablinga but nevertheless it was assailed by nazi hatred. Before noon, on June 22, regular army units – frontier guards and Red Army men – had waged a battle with the Germans. But the aggressors had a ready-made version about guilty partisans concocted in the nazi factories of ideological slander. "For the outside world," Goebbels said confidentially to his assistants, "our propaganda must strongly emphasize that Germany is in favour of a peaceful settlement of all outstanding problems... The blame for the fact that this was not achieved by peaceful means should be skillfully cast on those who oppose Germany's just demands."¹⁹

Some twenty kilometres separate Ablinga from the Soviet-German border. The Hitlerites entered the village in the middle of the day and by dusk began to herd people into wooden barracks. All forty-two of the villagers were killed.

The people's memory preserved this tragedy for thirty years. In the spring of 1972 Majoras, a folk carver from Klaipeda, shared his thoughts with his colleagues from Žemaitija and other areas of Lithuania. As a result a group of twenty-eight folk carvers gathered at the Vosmoye Marta Collective Farm in the summer to immortalize the tragedy of Ablinga. Villagers from the neighbourhood found and brought in thirty oak logs and the carvers transformed them into images. Each of them undertook to commemorate one person or one family. Thirty oak memorials were born of human suffering and sacred memory. Peasants from pre-war Ablinga have come to life and gathered on the slope of the Žveginiiai mound as on a traditional holiday – only their faces lack holiday merriment. Even Barbshas, who used to crack jokes at the drop of a hat, is not entertaining the

guests. He has raised his shoulders and stretched out his arms in tragic amazement as if asking: "How could this be possible?"

Ablinga and Dalva are, in effect, two time limits – the very beginning and the very end of the bloody occupation – two landmarks that reflect the implementation of the nazi policy of exterminating the Soviet peoples.

Echoing Hitler, Goebbels cynically declared that "this whole garbage-heap of minor nationalities that still exists in Europe should be liquidated as quickly as possible. The creation of an integrated Europe is to be the goal of our future struggle."²⁰

The Lithuanian woman with the mournful expression carved in granite by Jokubonis, the Mother in Pirčiupiai, the Byelorussian Mother in Dalva, the image of a Khatyn peasant woman created by sculptor Selikhanov, the oak carvings in Ablinga and the fire-ravaged oaks in Tupichitsy on Bobrovitskoye Lake cry out for all the honest people on earth to hear, warning them and calling for vigilance.

Archeologists say that tools and pottery are the earliest artifacts of primitive man. The stove and the well, however, can most likely be considered the monuments of man's social life.

The stove and the well, reminding one of bread and water, always remained in the villages that were burned down by the enemy; they were like two symbols of life, destroyed and trampled down.

There is a memorial to the victims of nazi brutality in Britsalovichy village, Osipovichy District, Mogilyov Region. Its authors are the young sculptors Krokhaev, Andreyev and Solyatitsky.

An obelisk stands on a hillock at the edge of an oak grove, beyond which flows the picturesque

Svisloch River. On either side of the obelisk are six concrete memorial plates; a stone path leads from the obelisk to the village. On the path stands the figure of a boy in his teens on a pedestal made out of ordinary boulders.

The obelisk's shape brings to mind one of the brick chimneys which during the war stood in broken ranks in the fire-ravaged Byelorussian villages. Through the open inlets and smashed smoke-screens the wind would burst into the sooty mouths of the chimneys and there, as if on an organ, it would play an endless requiem for the people who had lived here. Those who survived found no escape from this soul-rending tune. Their hearts were filled with anxiety and in the dead of night they would dream of their tortured dear ones, acquaintances and neighbours who entered their dreams like ghosts and begged them to commit their burned bones to the earth.

We, who collected these reminiscences, often recall Lozovaya village in Osipovichy District, Mogilyov Region, where some women were laying in fodder by the state-farm shed, and particularly what we were told there by **Volga Grigoryevna Grishanovich** and **Nastasya Fomovna Trepanok**, two elderly friends who survived the nazi brutality...

"...We would go into the forest and cry our eyes out," Volga told us, "then we'd come running back to the site of the fire – we'd dreamt they were saying: 'Why didn't you bury us?'... How many times we came running! We'd dig around, dig around, find the bones and set the grave straight again..."

"...One old man... He had a dream about his wife: 'Why don't you bury me?' she says in the dream. 'I'm lying there under the stove!'"

People used to say that an unmourned soul will find no peace in the next world. Now, after this violent death, the old man felt it necessary to per-

form his human duty to his dear ones even in his dreams.

People were wept over and buried according to ancient custom. Those of the living who remained homeless as a result of the fire often did not have so much as a few planks to make a coffin. The bodies were placed in cupboards or trunks which were not destroyed by the fire because they had been buried with the linen and clothing that they held to keep these from the enemy. Some bodies were buried without any coffins at all; it was hard finding even a sheet or a kerchief to cover the dead person's eyes and hands. This is how it was; we heard such stories in different parts of Byelorussia.

Both in Khatyn and Britsalovichichi sculptors turned an ordinary chimney into an obelisk, an alarming reminder of the past horrors.

They created an obelisk shaped like a chimney – a tall, straight, rectangular column, hollow in the middle. The sides have gaps in them as does a real chimney that has been ravaged by fire. These gaps, however, form a pattern – a stylised laurel branch. It is a tribute to you, martyrs and toilers of the earth, from those who were destined to survive and keep up the life of their native village and their home land. Through the leaf-shaped cut-outs in the obelisk one can see its hollow inside, which glows white – an unusual colour for a chimney. At night the inside is illuminated and the laurel leaves shine forth against the starry midnight sky.

Two sides of the obelisk are covered with majolica basreliefs that speak in the succinct language of symbols about the triumph of life over death, and the beauty of man following the age-old calling of tiller of the soil.

Not far from the obelisk there stands an old pine tree with a stork nest on its top. The ancient pine has withered away. Who can tell whether it

was from old age or from the searing grief of the people around it... The stork nest, like martyr's wreath of thorns, crowns its reddish head.

Storks are plentiful in the low land along the Svisloch River. As usual, they teach their lanky, black-legged young to fly round in circles. Of an evening they can be seen here tucking under their wings first one and then the other tired leg. The young storks stand motionless, and this pine and the nest with its inhabitants seem to be part of the memorial. The oaks that stretch over the sandy hillock from the pine to the riverbank complete the picture. They are tall and powerful-looking, for their roots have reached the juices of the river and their foliage is so abundant that it conceals under its thick garlands both the yellow sand dunes and the polished grey concrete of the large memorial plates bearing the names of all 676 victims of nazi ferocity. Again we see those terrifying columns of identical names: Borozna, Borozna, Borozna, Olkhovik, Olkhovik, Olkhovik... Dozens of people of one and the same descent...

Some distance away from the pine and the chimney-obelisk stands the red concrete figure of a boy. He is one of the Britsalovichichi children whom the storks brought into the peasants' houses in great numbers before the war. It was a big village with more than two hundred households, and there were children, many of them, in each house...

"I had only just entered that shed," recalls **Ganna Ivanovna Potapeika**, one of the few Britsalovichichi villagers who survived, "when they started shouting: 'Leave those Kinder!'"

"The children walked in with me clutching at my skirt. Both my own and other people's. Four of them were my own and I was carrying the baby in my arms. The moment we walked in they

opened fire...

"They fired and fired at us and then began laughing: 'Russische Schwein kaputt!'"

"They went on shooting some more and kicking us.

"Well, I just lay there, I lay just where I fell when they shot me down. There was all this blood – my flesh was all torn up.

"Then they walked off to another shed that stood across the yard. They went off and I could hear them laughing some more over there, shooting away and mumbling something among themselves.

"They're coming back again! What is to be done? Get up!... But the moment I raised myself blood would begin pouring from all of my wounds. So I lay down again. Well, when they returned some people were still moaning so they fired a round at us and left. They locked the gates and went to the school..."

The young sculptors also heard the stories of Ganna Potapeika and other surviving women about the tragic fate of the Britsalovich children – harrowing stories. They chose one of them – a story about a little boy who in January 1943, when peaceful villagers were being butchered here, dashed out of the shed where people were burning and began running down the hillside, until he was stopped by a bullet...

The artist immortalized him, rooted to the spot in tragic bewilderment.

Krokhaev, the author of the memorial, might have also heard the account of **Ulita Kondratovna Olkhovik** – a most unusual story that tempts one to give a mystical interpretation to the events. Driven to frenzy by horror, the seriously wounded woman saw the following sight during the night:

"There was a heap of bodies lying there, the whole village was here, filling the yard. They were lying both in the yard and in the shed. Then the moon descended low over the earth. And a man is standing on the moon, dressed in a white robe. It wasn't that someone told me about it – I saw it with my own eyes from the shed. Through a crack. He had a belt round his waist and a winter hat on and boots. He was standing on the moon. Over the dead bodies..."

"I was utterly lost then, didn't know what to do. My two daughters had been shot, my husband was shot and I didn't know where my two sons were..."

"He stood there on the moon. Right on the moon. And the circle of the moon came very, very low over the earth! And he's standing on the moon!... Just an ordinary man, with a belt round his waist, a white robe on, and black trousers, wearing boots, and a winter hat..."

"I spent three days and nights in the shed together with the dead people. It was as if I was guarding their bodies. There were German sentries standing at every corner. They would walk round the shed and put their ear to the wall to hear if anybody was still breathing... Even if someone was still alive he couldn't go on living there. Had I stayed in there another day I would have been suffocated by the foul air... I had grown so weak – without drinking a thing for three days..."

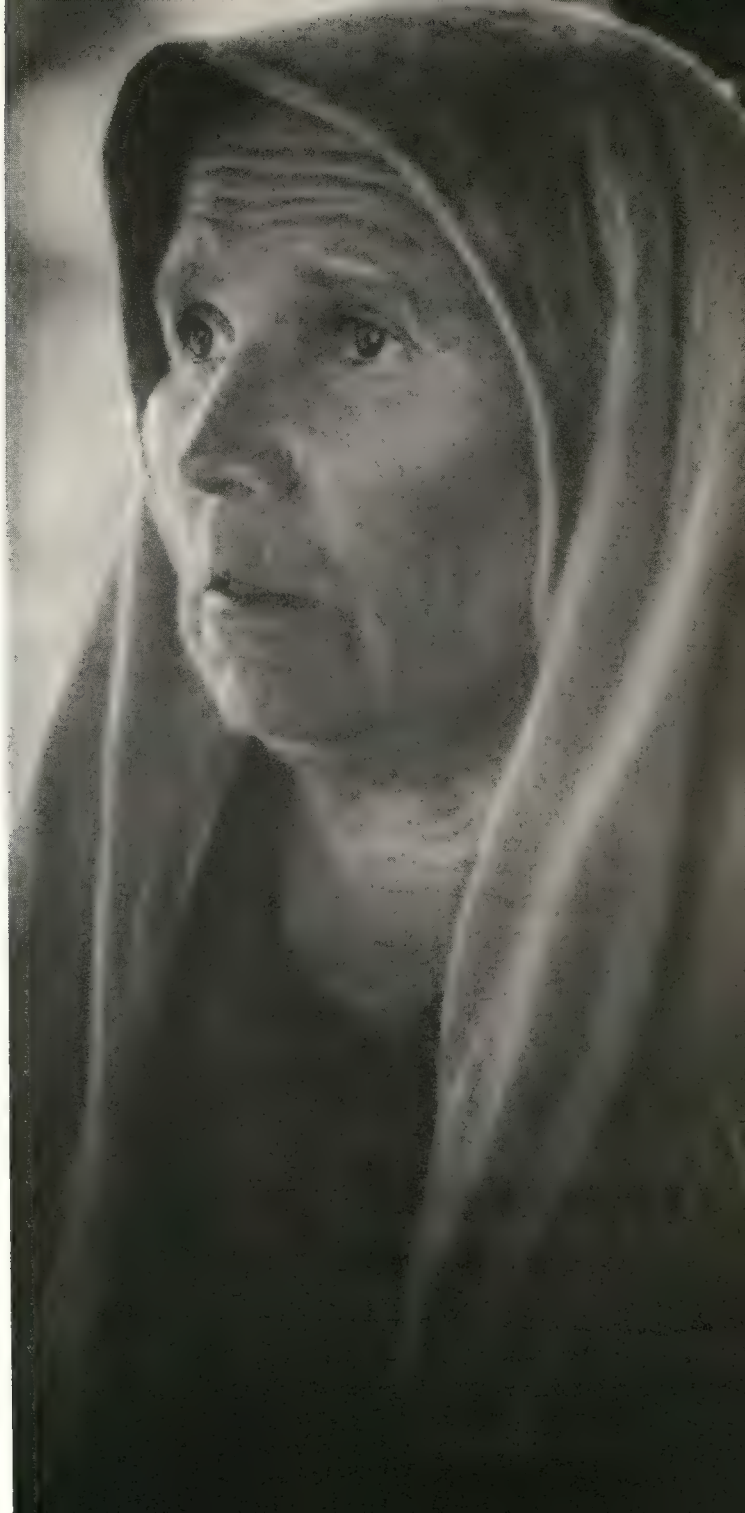
"Meanwhile they were carting off everything left in the village. I saw it all through the crack. They took everything, both dirty and clean linen, whatever was left anywhere in the houses.

"Well, then I saw they were getting ready to leave; they poured petrol over the shed and set fire to it. Then the gates somehow opened a crack... And I thought to myself: I'd rather walk out into the yard and get shot in the back than to



Here, until January 8, 1943, stood the village of Makovye

Ulita Olkhovik



boil in the fire! They were running to and fro about the yard, and I crossed the vegetable garden and walked off. Then I recalled what people say: 'When stricken by misfortune walk straight ahead and don't look back!' Well, you know, I walked on like this with my back to them and reached the forest without looking back once. And they were still running to and fro about the yard...

"Well, I finally came to the forest. My hand was wounded, one of my fingers was crushed, but still I couldn't tear it off when I tried. There I met some partisans. Their doctor bandaged me up..." *(She bursts into tears.)*

The stories of the remaining martyrs with immense power recreate the horrible senselessness of the crimes that were wrought on the peaceful village.

Let us return to **Ganna Ivanovna Potapeika's** recollections.

"Well, the nazis left the village to raid the partisans, but when they entered the dug-out a mine exploded and killed perhaps ten of them. Well, after they were blown up by those mines they returned and surrounded our village... Now they pitied neither the children, nor the old folk, they herded all of us, everyone, together. Herded us into the barn that stood right here, where that monument now is. It was a big barn, belonged to the collective farm. It was in the evening when they herded us there, the days were short then, so it was in the evening. It was cold, terribly cold when they were herding all of us there. It was the coldest time of winter with a lot of snow, too! It was hardly possible to run away with the snow knee-deep as it was. The moment you stepped on it you couldn't pull your foot out...

"We sat there till morning. It was already getting light...

"'Well,' people said, 'what are they going to do with us? For some reason they're not letting us go. Well,' they said, 'they'll drive out our cattle and take everything away, the hens and cows, and drive away the young people. That's why they're not letting us go, so the mothers and all the rest don't start crying and wailing...'

"That was how we thought.

"Well, we sat looking out of the window... It was about two o'clock when we saw them coming. Praise the Lord, they were coming to let us out! They were coming, many of them, and their chiefs along with them. They would set us free! They opened the door and ordered us out: 'Come on, come out into the street!' We walked out into the street and they told us to turn onto the big road. When we turned onto the road we guessed they were going to do something to us. The women broke into tears and began screaming...

"They brought us to where some hats and bags were scattered about — they had belonged to our men. We were sure now they were going to kill us, too... Either burn us alive or shoot us down. They had already placed machine-guns in each window...

"Then they knocked at the window:

"'Send someone out!'

"They had shot almost everybody down, even this woman who did the cooking for them. They now had nobody to cook their food. There was one woman among us who knew some German. So she came out with her baby but they threw aside the child and led her away.

"Then they began taking us away in groups of about twenty people — to shoot us..."

Ivan Borozna, the collective-farm chairman and a front-line soldier during the war, was the one who suggested that the villagers put up the

memorial in Britsalovichi. His younger brother was head of a partisan detachment which was active in these parts.

The detachment consisted mainly of Britsalovich lads, and their families were the first to fall victim to the executioners. When the war was over the partisans raised the village from ruins — they took apart the burnt chimneys, built new houses and cleaned up the wells.

Those wells in fire-ravaged villages...

We were no less struck by the sorrowful sight of the sweep of a well, or rather only its forked pivot extending into the sky, than by the chimney-obelisks in Khatyn and Britsalovichi. This lonely pivot was the only thing that was left of Makovye village in Osipovich District.

In place of the village there are now a few large boulders bleached by the rain and several apple trees gone wild. Another well that stood at the edge of the village has been rebuilt and now the sweep-pole sways jauntily above the well frame, the tin pail attached to its end rattling in the breeze. This well stands near a herdsman's cottage, the owner of which is old **Anton Mikolayevich Pavlovich**, formerly a partisan and the only indirect witness of the village tragedy.

"It all happened at the coldest time of year, in 'forty-three," he began his story. "In the morning they rounded up the village. I left the forest and made for home. They opened fire at me, so I ran off, hid in the snow. I wanted to take my family away into the forest. I had two children, you see. But when they began shooting at me I dashed to the forest and kept moving from place to place there. They remained in the village for three days. It was impossible to force your way through there; the moment I tried they lit me up with a flare and opened fire..."

"By now there were already several of us hiding there. When we came back — everything had been burned to ashes. On the third day we gathered all that remained of them to bury... Before the war there were forty-four families living here.

"I'm a watchman now, look after the hay-field..."

The old man is standing in the midst of a large glade sown with timothy-grass. This whole place used to be a village with the simple and homey name of Makovye. The picture of the village as it used to be — with its cottages, yards and people — still lingers in his memory... Anton Mikolayevich carefully guards the mirages of his youth. Lost in thought as he speaks about the old village, he points his finger at four huge boulders and describes the house that once stood on this foundation. Then he points to three birches growing in the glade and tells us about the unfinished house in which the Makovye villagers were shot down and burned.

The words engraved on the plain obelisk surrounded by lilac bushes say that the nazis burned the village on January 8, 1943, and killed more than 270 of its inhabitants as well as people from neighbouring villages who had come here, to these forest parts, to hide from the executioners.

Of all the monuments we saw in different parts of Byelorussia, sumptuous or unassuming, standing since the days of occupation on individual or common graves, there was one that left a very special impression on us.

It stood in the Lipichansky Forest, in Grodno Region, near the sad grey farmstead called Yablonka which rose after the war on the site of a former village gutted by fire, in the midst of a vast wilderness. We saw this unusual memorial in the summer of 1971 before it had been replaced by



**Within nine kilometres of a country
road—the tragedy of five villages:**

Drazhaki

Yamishche

Zazerye

Shchemilovka

Zuevo



another one, more elaborately designed and modern-looking. The former was extremely modest and excellently fit the village surroundings with its stone pyramid topped by a rusted cast-iron cross. It stood – and that was the most unusual part – on the low cemented foundation of a well...

A peasant family is buried in the well. The somewhat faded inscription, engraved on the monument, read that a family of five was dumped into the depths of this well either killed beforehand for more convenience, or thrown in alive, screaming and crying... They were Ivan Parkhach, aged forty-eight, his wife Agata, aged forty-seven, their eighteen-year-old daughter Zina, their sixteen-year-old son Mikhas and their fourteen-year-old daughter Maria. They were killed on December 14, 1942. The monument was put up by their niece and son-in-law, who later settled on this sad farmstead after building themselves a house farther away from the well.

It was not so much the monument itself that pulled our heart strings as the human duty it embodied, the duty to set it up as it was, quietly and carefully, so as not to disturb the peaceful sleep of the dead.

In other places monuments and people conveyed a similar message.

In the village of Kostyukovich, Mozyr District, we came across four graves made from wells in which the village inhabitants were buried after they were asphyxiated in *Gaswagens* of the kind that, beginning in 1942 were produced in Berlin by order of Himmler. We were told about the hair-raising events in Kostyukovich by the few remaining villagers. Now the wells have been covered with concrete, and memorial marble plaques have been cemented into them. The inscription on one of them says that the children were buried here, the other lists the killed women and the third and fourth – the men...

There are countless obelisks in forests and rye fields all over Byelorussia!

We came across five of them in Shumilino District, Vitebsk Region, over a stretch of nine kilometres. Four of them stood, one after the other, to the left and right of the village road commemorating the villages that once existed here – Drazhaki, Yamishche, Shchemilovka, and Zazerye. The fifth and tallest obelisk stood in the field among the rye stirring in the wind. The inscription on it says that here once stood the Zuyevo farmstead, which housed the Sirotin underground District Party Committee during the first years of occupation. The first session of this political and military headquarters of the partisan movement in the Sirotin area was held in 1941. A year later the farmstead was burned down...

The obelisk stands at the edge of the glade, in the grass, against the background of rye spikes...

The earth of Byelorussia preserves memories of tragedy and staunchness. There is not a place in this whole land – from Brest to Orsha and from ancient Polotsk to Turov – that does not deserve its own monument. The entire country was trampled by nazi boots, wounded and lay writhing in pain and seething with revenge. When you see the carefully restored St. Sophia Church, which remembers the times of Vseslav Charodei and other heroes from "The Lay of Igor's Host" facing the Mound of Immortality raised on the opposite bank of the Dvina River in Polotsk, you perceive them both as historical relics of our native land.

The people's memory still passes judgement and chastens the nazi brutes and murderers. The memorials in Khatyn and Ablinga, in Lidice and Oradour, in Dalva and Britsalovich, all our countless monuments are vigilant guards of this memory...

Khatyn and Other Khatyns

The old man seems to be holding the boy's body above the entire earth. The stone body of the dead boy looks so soft and yielding... The black abyss of the old man's eyes tell better than anything else what took place here in Khatyn. They ask the world: what happened here, and can it be true, people, can what was done to us have really been?

"...Then they took me to that shed, too. My daughter, son and wife were already there. And many other people. I said to my daughter:

"Why didn't you put any clothes on?"

"They tore off our clothes," she replied.

"Well, they would bring new people to the shed and lock it up, bring more people and lock it up again. They had herded so many people in there that it was impossible to breathe, you couldn't so much as raise your arm. People were screaming, and the children worst of all – naturally, there were so many of us and we were all scared to death. Hay was stored there in the shed, and straw, for the cattle. So they set fire to it from the roof. The eaves were burning, sparks were showering down on people's heads, the hay and straw caught fire and people began to suffocate, we were so crammed together there was nothing to breathe. No air. I said to my son:

"Lean against the wall, plant your feet and hands against it..."

"Suddenly the doors opened. They opened but people wouldn't go out. What's the matter? They're shooting out there, people said, shooting... But the screaming was so loud that the gunfire, the banging, couldn't be heard. Naturally enough, people are burning, fire was showering down on their heads, and all those children – the screaming was so loud that... I said to my son:

"Get out over their heads, over their heads!"

"I gave him a hand and myself got on my knees to crawl between people's legs. But the dead bodies all tumbled down on me. They tumbled down on me and I couldn't breathe. But I pushed them off by moving my shoulders – I was younger then and stronger – and crawled on. I had only just managed to get to the threshold when the eaves collapsed and the fire rained down on people's heads... My son also darted out, only his head was scorched and his hair singed. He had run some five metres away from the shed when a bullet brought him down. Corpses fell on top of him, all of them machine-gunned.

"Get up," I said, "they've gone away, driven off already!"

"I started pulling him out but his guts were already..."

"He only had time to ask if his mother was alive..."

"I hope to God that nobody who lives on earth should ever see and hear such misery!..."

This is an excerpt from the account of **Iosif Iosifovich Kaminsky**, who lived in the former village of Khatyn, Logoisk District, Minsk Region.

People from neighbouring villages and from far away stop by the figure of the man petrified with grief and rage and holding his child in his weakened arms; they see scores of ash-grey chimneys, which, like belltowers, give forth a metallic ringing. The peals of the bells are sharp and brief like suppressed pain. Paved black paths, as if made from tomb stones, lead to stone gates that are open forever and to the tall dark belltower chimneys on which the names of former villagers have been engraved... Kaminsky, Kaminskaya, Kaminskaya... Yaskevich, Yaskevich, Yaskevich...

Iotka, Iotka, Iotka... Novitsky, Novitskaya... 50 years old, 42, 31, 17, 12, 3, 1, 1, 1... Children, so many children among the killed...

Could it be this that the Führer of German militarism had in mind in 1937 when, speaking of supplying Germany with food at the expense of the East, he uttered this ominously incomprehensible phrase: "...A child eats more bread than a grown-up..."?

Some five years later Alyona Bulava, a woman from the Polesye village of Sloboda in Petrikov District, not knowing these words pronounced by the insane dictator, saw with her own eyes their real meaning:

"...People were screaming and shouting! My God, how those children were crying! It was terrifying – if only you'd heard them. Well, simply terrifying! They drove some people into houses but us they just killed on our street, surrounded us and slaughtered us..."

She, one of the few surviving women, seems to be asking somebody, addressing him through the microphone raised to her withered lips as she expresses the bewilderment of all people on earth:

"I feel frightened just thinking of it.... I lived during those past wars, when those wars went on... I wasn't young any more... But what was it, what had made them like this – I don't know. They were wild beasts, not people. They weren't people, they were beasts."

The entire Hitler propaganda machine was intended "to liberate" the selfish burgher from all "the chimeras of civilization", from everything connected in our minds with conscience, humanity and culture. In exchange for this he was promised a place in the "new Europe" – somewhere in the highest quarters.

"Those who join me are destined to become members of this new caste," said the Führer of the "thousand-year Reich", working himself up

to a frenzy. "The society of the German nation will be divided according to hierarchy; subordinate to this ruling stratum and below it will be a stratum of new slaves. The nobility, consisting of the most celebrated people and senior officials, will stand high above all this. The broad masses of slaves will be given the boon of being illiterate. We ourselves will get rid of all humane and scientific prejudices."²¹

This is, so to say, the prospect for the next thousand years which nazism promised to the world. In the language of military orders and addresses of the nazi High Command to the rank-and-file soldiers, it sounded like this:

"You have no heart, no nerves, there is no need for them in war. Destroy all pity and compassion in yourself – kill every Russian and Soviet, do not hesitate if you see in front of you an old man or a woman, a girl or boy – kill them and by this you will save your own life, will secure the future of your family and crown yourself in eternal glory."²²

Ridding themselves of everything that has made man Man, of what they called "humane and scientific prejudices" the nazis turned not merely into beasts, as Alyona Bulava bitterly called them, but into something more loathsome and infinitely more dangerous. The claimants to the title of "supermen" turned into "superbeasts"...

On the tall chimneys we see names of entire families killed by the nazis. These chimneys stand in the place of ravaged houses and barnyards, they tower on the hillocks and their peal, so infinitely eternal and yet painfully close to our day, seems to probe the very depths of human hearts – the hearts of those who are alive today and have come to these parts. In the very same way sound waves measure the depth of the ocean. People, young and old, come here from beyond the Urals and from the West – from Poland, the Federal

Republic of Germany, the United States... They come from other Byelorussian Khatyns, handfuls of earth from which have been buried here or whose names have been engraved on the Khatyn wall. They also come from Byelorussian villages whose names are not to be found here but whose fate was similar to that of Khatyn...

Each person hears these pealing bells and in each they evoke a different echo, for each of us has his own memories of the past war, his own or his father's, grandfather's...

But after they have visited Khatyn their memory becomes more acute, and that is as it should be. For what has happened here and in other Byelorussian villages concerns everyone and should be known to all. For all of mankind has a common destiny and a common future.

Many feel this especially keenly here, in Khatyn.

As the American journalist Mike Davidow writes, it is difficult to fully perceive the depth of another's suffering unless you learn for yourself the boundless suffering of tragedy. He came to the conclusion that the facts about the ordeal of Byelorussia are beyond the limits of his own ability to comprehend the tragic. One fourth of its population was killed and eighty per cent of its territory turned into ashes. How is one to visualize such a thing? Mike Davidow asks. This would be similar to a picture that is beyond imagination: over fifty million Americans are killed and their entire country is destroyed except for its east coast.²³

German fascism had its special disguises. One for France, another for Norway and a third for the Belgians and Scandinavians. There was yet another – for the Slovaks and Bulgarians...

Those who were kept behind barbed wires in the Majdaneks and Auschwitzes saw nazism with its teeth bared, without any disguise.

But as German fascism moved farther East it

began to an ever lesser degree to hide behind the mask of "European manners". There it walked out from behind barbed wires and crawled out of Gestapo dungeons, and, drawing its veil, swooped upon towns and villages – upon millions of children, women and old people, Poles, Byelorussians, Ukrainians and Russians, on all those who according to secret nazi plans were not supposed to live and take up "lebensraum".

"Our task is not to germanize the East in the old sense, that is, to inculcate the German language and German laws, but to see to it that only people with true German blood live in the East!"²⁴ Himmler openly wrote in the press in August 1942.

But however widely, on however frightfully vast a scale this was being done, still it was only a beginning, that is, if one thinks of the nazi plans "for final settlement" on the scale of entire continents.

People today know what plans nazism nurtured for the world and mankind in the first half of the twentieth century.

But there are also people among us who can tell how it all really was and what would have happened if the worst had come to the worst and nazism had snatched the future from mankind's hands.

No matter what we have heard and read about nazism, these people have seen it at a far closer range than we, have seen right at their side *the bared teeth of the "superbeast" at a moment when there was no longer anything to separate the nazi and his victim and the nazi's whole nature, everything there was in him, was laid bare before his victim's eyes.*

Khatyn has become a symbol of the Byelorussian villages destroyed by the nazis. 149 people perished in the fire here. More people were murdered in some of the other Khatyns, less in others.

How is one to measure the suffering of even a single family when the agony of the mother and father was multiplied a million times by the pain and terror of their children at their side... Ask any of the women how many people were killed in her village and you will hear one and the same answer: "Many! Oh, ever so many!" Whether the nazi killed or burned to death a thousand, a hundred or ten people she will say these words with the same profound sorrow and poignant pity. This reflects the elementally humanistic concepts and feelings common to the people.

But what if it was not one but hundreds of families — one thousand eight hundred and forty-three people, as were killed in Borki village?

It was a big village in Bobruisk Region, or, to be more exact, several settlements united around a single collective farm.

On that day in July 1942 they were united by death...

New people live in Borki today, now that the war is over. Only a few of the residents remained from the old Borki that was razed to the ground. They will tell you what took place on that day.

Even today some of them gasp for breath as if under an unbearable weight when they begin to tell their story. **Maria Pilipovna Zakadynitsa**, a sickly elderly woman, only managed to say a few sentences before her breath failed her and she could speak no more. It was memories that contracted her throat...

"I can't even tell how they beat me up, me and my boys; I had three of them... I says: 'Don't follow me!' I leave the children on the shore and plunge into the lake, into the water. The children are crying but I plunge into the water thinking, well, I'll drown myself and that will be the end of it all. Then I took my children and lay down, we

are all lying there and I'm holding one of them in my arms and we see the Germans coming our way again... But they didn't come close. And I kept on lying there..."

QUESTION: "Did they walk from house to house?"

"They would seize you and drag you into the house, drop you into the house if you were in the yard. They did that in every house. That's what they did with my sister, and my mother and all my folks... Later they burned down all the houses. Later still we went into the forest, all those who remained alive, and my children lived there too, feeding on grass.

"They killed many people, oh, ever so many! The whole village, in fact."

Anastasya Illarionovna Kasperova, who saw much more of what happened, is in better health and remembers it all in greater detail. She has clear eyes and an open face and a habit of speaking in a loud, sing-song voice. As she goes on with her story her voice grows progressively louder...

"Well, this is how it all began... We went to bed. In the morning my mother walked out into the yard and said:

"'Dearie, go wake up your husband.'

"My husband would run away each time the Germans came. We lived in this outer settlement. So my husband got out of bed, went out into the yard and came back inside saying:

"'It's too late to leave for the forest. They've already surrounded us!'

"So we sat waiting. It was still early in the morning — and we see a motorcycle driving down the street. Nobody else, just this one motorcycle.

Made the rounds of all the settlements. We had perhaps seven of them here. And he drove around all of them. I says: 'Something's going to happen!'

"My husband said: 'Get some breakfast ready.' We started the stove going. I had three children and my husband and mother to take care of. So I took a bucket and went to the well to fetch some water. The well was right by the house. While I was getting the water I heard bullets whistling by — tiv-tiv-tiv. They must have been at the edge of the forest already and could see me through their binoculars, and they fired at me. But I drew some water and went back to the house.

"'You know,' I said, 'they were firing right at me. These bullets were whirring quite close by. Well, never mind,' I went on, 'they were here before, taking people away — perhaps they're going to drive people away someplace again?'

"We talked it over in the house without knowing what to do. Then we saw people coming down the road from Dzerzhinsky settlement. The polizeis were leading their families away."

QUESTION: "Did you have any polizeis in Borki?"

"We didn't have a garrison, but there were some polizeis. They all gathered here, our own and those from other villages. They must have been hiding here or something. They were afraid of the partisans, so they hid in cottages.

"Then my old man said:

"'The Dzerzhinsky polizeis are bringing in their families.'

"Suddenly we heard a shot in the school. A frightfully loud shot near the school. My husband and a neighbour of ours went out into the street. We went on sitting in the house. Then a truck came our way. The wife of my husband's brother was staying with us at the time and she said:

"'You know, it looks like they're going to kill us all!'

"Then her little son came. He was wearing these shoes, rubber galoshes they were. That is what we wore during the war. His mother said to him: 'Sonny, what did you put those rubber boots on for? Your little legs will burn for a very long time in rubber boots.'

"I said: 'What in the world are you talking about, Volga, what are you talking about!'

"'I feel they are going to burn us, to kill us!'

"'That can't be!' I said.

"What was it, perhaps she felt it in her heart... But I felt I was going to live. So I answered: 'We are going to stay alive.'

"But she said: 'I feel they'll kill us!'"

QUESTION: "How old was her boy?"

"He must've been about eight or so. Then we saw a truck approaching. And it turned around at once and pointed the muzzle of a gun, or whatever it was, at us. We started crying, saying:

"'They're going to fire, fire at the village!'

"We were awtully frightened. My husband's mother said: 'I'll go and see, perhaps they've come to get some eggs. I'll go collect some and give them away.'

"We were ready to pay ransom for our souls... She went off, and that woman and her son following her. Three Germans went after them. And then I heard sounds of shooting coming from my father-in-law's house. We lived nearby, like from here to the fence. When we heard the shooting in his house we all started to cry. But my husband said: 'Don't cry. That truck has come for me, not you!'

"He thought they were going to take the men away to the camp as they had before. But I replied: 'No matter for whom it's come, it still means tears for us.'

"Well, let's have a look and see. Perhaps they

are just killing chickens,' my husband said. 'Or maybe they've come and are killing the boar in the shed.'

"But no. We saw the boar run out of the shed and the chickens strutting round the yard. No, they had killed my father-in-law's family. And now, as soon as they had killed them, three of them made for our house. They were just next door, you see.

"They came to us...

"It was up to fate which of us was to remain alive. When we saw them we began to wring our hands. They were coming, and we would have to part with this world... They reached our gate but stopped to grab something... No, it wasn't like this. They were walking along but for some reason turned back to the porch. Perhaps they hadn't finished someone off there. We understood it all later. They... There was one poor soul there... This little girl probably came to her senses – she must have been stunned or something – and began to cry. So they returned and I heard another shot – they finished off the poor kid. Now they started for our house again. We were standing all the while, waiting. We were all confused and didn't know what to do. They were now making for our house – right for our gate. They were walking and stopped at the gate. We looked at them through the window and they looked at us. How we cried! Then they... The one in the rear mumbled something, said something in German – and they all went back across the street. There was still another house left there, at the end of the street. They had skipped it. So they walked into that yard, but we knew there was no one there for they had all gone away, run off. So I said... No, he said:

"'Valechka, dear,' – that was our daughter's name – 'go and have a look at what's going on at grandpa's place.'

"Off she went – she couldn't disobey her father. This was after they had already left. She looked and saw that all the people there were killed. That little girl must have wanted to run out the door but they killed her on the spot. Our Valechka came running back:

"'Oh, dad! (She was climbing over the fence and crying.) Daddy!'

"And she waved at us to run off!

"She came dashing into the house: 'Daddy, they've killed all the folks at grandpa's. Let's run away, daddy!'

"She said her grandpa was lying by the table and his blood was running all across the room.

"I took my son and daughter by the hand and walked off. We went into the neighbouring yard.

"The kids had already seen people being killed so they said: 'Mummy dear, save us, hide us someplace!'

"'My poor children, the rye hasn't grown yet, there's not a blade of grass yet anywhere!' I said. 'Where am I to hide you?'

"It was a very late spring, you know. Nothing had grown yet anywhere. I said:

"'I can't hide you anywhere, my dears. Find a place yourselves if you can!'

"The neighbour's wife was pleading with her man: 'Let's get away! Let's run off, Senechka, dear, let's!'

"But he said: 'You're going to stay where you are,' and wrapped his child in a big hand-woven shawl. Then he turned to us: 'As for you, get out!'

"Well, since he wanted us to 'get out' – maybe we would have been killed with them otherwise – since he wanted us to 'get out', we left. I grabbed my two children and left. I broke down part of a tall paling, squeezed through it with the kids, crossed one of the yards and walked out into the street. There I came across a woman.

"'Ma'am,' I said, 'our parents have been killed,



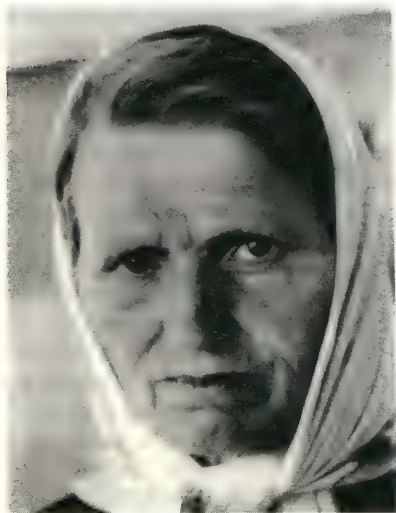
The home of the Kasperovs

Anastasya Kasperova

Maria Zakadynitsa

Ganna Sinitsa
with her grand-daughter





where are we to go now?"

"She said... I was lucky to have come across a good woman. She said:

"‘You know what, let’s run off to the forest. I’ll go fetch my boys and we’ll, all of us, make for the forest!’

"‘All right,’ I said, ‘let’s do that.’

"I returned to our neighbour’s yard once again. But they chased me away.

"‘Go away, go away from here!’

"As if they might be killed because of my children! But I said: ‘No I won’t. I’ve got nowhere to go to. I’m going to stay with you.’

"They ran out to see what was going on at their uncle’s – he had a family of eight and lived just across the street. His wife and children had gone outside and were sitting in their vegetable garden. They begged for mercy, stretching out their arms, but the German just shot them one after the other until he’d shot them all. When the mistress of the house saw that, she came rushing into her yard shouting:

"‘Let’s get going now, neighbour!’

"Before she had wanted to drive me out, but when she saw what was going on, they both said: ‘Let’s hurry off!’ We up and left. Just then that other woman who had gone to fetch her sons came along and my eldest daughter also came running. There was a huge pit there filled with water and they, my daughter and that woman’s son, fell into the pit and began to drown, and the woman stood there saying:

"‘Don’t drown yourselves, children, don’t drown yourselves!’

"Then the German, when he was through with killing that other family, started firing at them. They then clambered out of the pit and came running to us, to where I was. And we all started to run."

QUESTION: "Did they try to drown them-

selves of their own free will?"

"They were so scared they wanted to drown, our children did, but his mother said to them: ‘Don’t drown yourselves, children, get out of the water.’ And just then the Germans started rattling away at them... Well, we bade farewell to each other there in the yard, they embraced their folks and I mine. We were to be killed, you see. A German truck was coming from that direction and sentries were standing in front of us at the edge of the forest."

QUESTION: "Could you hear the Germans shooting all around?"

"They were shooting like mad! Shooting in all the settlements!"

Killing family after family, one household after another. The machine was at work, a machine every bolt of which was also made of people in a sense. These bipeds walked down the street making sure that they had not missed a single house or "living soul" – doing their work most meticulously. They even discussed things among themselves in a human language and each had ten billion cells of cerebral tissue in his skull. All of his "rightful" ten billion...

"They walked into our house," recalls **Ganna Mikitovna Sinitsa**, one of the witnesses. "We then had two adjoining cottages; one of the doors opened there, and we had a stove right here. My mother was pottering at the stove getting breakfast ready. She was standing there about to serve us and they entered the house – there were three of them – and one of them immediately fired his rifle. Fired it at her. I was standing here, behind the door to the other half of the house and they couldn’t reach me. When they fired at her she took a few steps towards the other cottage and collapsed on the threshold. She only managed to say:

'Children!' It was only after she fell that I screamed and jumped on top of the stove. There was no other place I could hide. I got on top of the stove and the rest followed me – my brother's wife, and her little girl, the neighbour's girl and my sister. I lay flat along the wall like this, my sister lay at my side and all the rest of them crawled on top of us. They used explosive bullets, just stood there beside the stove and fired. Fired right at the stove. One of them fired from the bed. They fired and fired. We had this cupboard then and they went through all the drawers. I don't know what it was they were looking for.

"When they left the house I started wondering what I was to do. There was a nook behind the stove – my father was a carpenter and he had stored boards there which he used to make window frames. It didn't yet enter my head that they were going to set the place on fire. I was afraid they might start throwing off the dead bodies from the stove... So I decided to crawl behind the stove. I clambered down and lay there. Then I thought: no, I'm not going to stay here for they will be sure to find me and kill me. I thought they were only burning our settlement, and grandfather lived close by, in Khvatovka. When grandfather comes, I thought, he won't find my body here behind the stove. He will find the rest but not me. I climbed back up. I crawled out and lay down where I had been. There I lay...

"Soon the Germans came back. They tramped around there in the house in their metal-tipped boots. What were they looking for? We had a down blanket there. This they took at once. They didn't take anything else then. We also had a gramophone. They played the gramophone, listened to one of our records... They whistled a bit and left.

"I was still lying on the stove. No, I thought, I've got to get out of here some way. They had

flung open the door of the house, opened the shed and led out the cow. I peeped out of one window, then out of another..."

Yakov Sergeyevich Strinatka was another witness of these events:

"...I heard shooting – ta-ta-ta! Then I saw two, no, three Germans, walking into the neighbouring yard. They grabbed Vladimir Dobrovolsky by the collar and dragged him into the house. I said: 'What's going on here?'

"Then I heard them fire a burst.

"After they were through we saw them make for another, new, cottage. We heard them shooting there. Then we saw them start for our place.

"When they came toward the house we, the master of the house and I, were sitting at the table. I jumped up to stay some distance away from him. I sat down on the bed. We heard them talking: ga-ga-ga-ga. We had panelled doors in the cottage. We saw them opening. One of them shoved in the old woman and then pushed her so hard that she went flying across the room and nearly fell down. She was just going to say something when he fired his Tommy-gun: rat-tat-tat! Then I... Everything went dark before my eyes and I didn't... All this time I was sitting on the bed. But the master's son suddenly rose from the table and they shot him down: rat-tat-tat! He slid down under the table. Then they turned to me and I toppled over... As I was falling they hit me four times – here, in the shoulder, here and here. I was as good as dead.

"I can't tell how long I lay there. Then I came to. My vocal cords were damaged and I wanted to say 'I'm alive!' But I couldn't utter a sound, nothing came out. I thought to myself that I should hide someplace. I still didn't know then that my arm was shot through. I fell to my knees so they wouldn't see me through the window. It

was then I felt that my arm was wounded! I held my bad arm like this and crawled under the stove. The lower part of the stove was right opposite the window so I thought they would be able to see my legs sticking out. But it was an old cottage and the floors, too, were old, so I lifted one of the floor-boards...

"There is something else I forgot to say: after shooting me they killed the old man. Before I passed out I saw how they were trying to push him in, while he was pressing against the door... When I came to the old man was lying right by my side and his legs were stretched out across that floor-board. When I crawled back out from under the stove I felt his body had already got stiff, his legs, I mean... So I moved him a little out of the way and lifted the floor-board. Then, supporting my hurt arm, I plunged in head first. My head hit the sand. I was in sand up to here. I tried to get it out of my ears and mouth with my left hand... Then I had to put the floor-board back in place. I started tugging at it with my left hand and finally slapped it into place. There was a wicker basket there filled with eggs and covered with oakum. I was all atremble, shivering all over! Then I heard them coming back again.

"'Oh, I've got a real good appetite for those shoes!' One of them said.

"He meant the boots the young lad was wearing – he had been in Finland during the war and brought them back from the army. I heard them talk for a while and then fall silent and leave.

"A little while later they returned. They took a look around and saw the trail of blood I had left when crawled under the stove. They thought I was still there and threw a grenade in there. It went off with such a bang that all the hens started clucking. The smoke from that grenade reached me down there. Even there in the hole it was more than I could stand!..."

This is what happened to those who remained in their houses. Others who managed to escape and ran across the field were stopped short by machine-gun fire.

"So we went off," **Anastasya Kasperova** continues in a louder and louder voice, "but they began shooting us from behind and, believe it or not, we were running across a fallow field and they mowed us down as we ran. We were perhaps three or four families, those who had managed to escape, and the shooting was so fierce that even a dog that was following its master would dig into the ground wherever it saw a bullet sink in, poor thing. They were firing at us from every direction ... people were running from all sides. This woman's son who had already served in the army was running ahead of us, and he waved his arm for us to lie low. I heard someone fall down behind me and one of the women saying farewell to her son: 'My dearest, good-bye!'

"I raised myself up a bit like this and saw a lad lying there and his mother on her knees above him. Then I saw that lad ahead of us getting to his feet and giving the command, wave at us and get up himself because he understood that the Germans would capture us alive. So we ran on again. I led along my two younger children, a boy and a girl. My girl wrenched her hand out of mine and ran ahead, to the forest. She ran alone while I followed her with the lad. By the time we reached the forest I was already wounded but I still didn't know it. As we approached the forest my daughter came running back to me crying:

"'Mummy, dear! I thought they killed you so I was coming back for them to kill me too.' Then she said: 'What's the matter with you?'

"I looked and saw... And ... I walked on to the forest. I didn't run any more for I felt my heart

was already... So I walked on... That is how I got away along with that other family and my oldest daughter..."

QUESTION: "What about that lad who gave you orders?"

"He, too, safely reached the forest. Misha Zhdanovich was his name. Later he joined the partisans. Twelve of us ran across that field, and four were killed on the way. As soon as we got into the forest Misha began to bandage our wounds. He dressed my wound and then his sister's. As we stood there in the forest they were still firing away – it was unbearable. All of a sudden my husband came running up to me:

"Oh, goodness!" he said.

"That was when he saw the blood, saw I was wounded. I didn't remember anything before that moment, but now that I saw my husband was alive I came to my senses! All the time I kept wondering what I was going to do with the children without my husband to help me.

"We went on sitting in the forest. It was all so terrifying – that shooting and firing, so terrifying, so terrifying! Where were we to go? We sat there for a while and then our men went to see if it was possible to cross the road. They went off to have a look at the road. Later we crossed the road and sat hiding in the forest on the other side. There were all these mosquitoes there, they stung us so and we couldn't even light a fire, there was nothing to light it with in the forest for we made off just as we were. My husband went and came across some shepherds from another village. They gave us some matches to start a fire with. We struck the matches and built a fire to at least make a smokescreen against those mosquitoes... We began to starve in the forest but when my husband would go somewhere in search of food the Germans would start to fire!..."

QUESTION: "How many people did they kill

in Borki?"

"They say one thousand eight hundred people; on the memorial it is written a thousand eight hundred and forty three."

QUESTION: "Did they just go from house to house and shoot people down?"

"That's just what they did. In this other village – Zakrinichye – they gathered people in one house and the rest in another and shot them down together. But in our village they just went from house to house killing people. Killed them and then set the houses on fire."

QUESTION: "And what happened to the policemen?"

"They herded all the policemen into the school, no, not the school itself but the school shed and set it on fire. Burned them alive with their families."

QUESTION: "Did they burn many of those policemen?"

"Well, there must have been about ten of them here..."

This is how the Germans exterminated the inhabitants of the largest Byelorussian Khatyn – more than 1,800 men, women and children from the village of Kirovskiye Borki, in Mogilyov Region.

After the nazis invaded the Soviet Union, the Central Department of Imperial Security began to work out its General plan "Ost", basing it on the "instructions" and "ideas" of the leading figures in the nazi Reich – Hitler, Himmler, Rosenberg and others.

The "Ost" plan itself has never been found; apparently it was destroyed. However, documents commenting upon it, supplementing it and evaluating it, have been preserved.

Here is an excerpt from one such document issued by the "Eastern Ministry":

"1/214, classified

Top secret!

Classified!

Berlin, 27. 4. 1942.

"Remarks and conjectures on the General Plan 'Ost' of the Reichsführer of the SS.

"Already in November it came to my knowledge that the Central Department of Imperial Security was working on a General Plan 'Ost'. At this time Standartenführer Ehlich, a head officer in the Central Department of Imperial Security, informed me of the figure envisaged in the plan — 31 million people of non-German origin that were to be subjected to resettlement..."

"The Eastern Ministry" in the person of Doctor Wetzel, head of the colonization department, having counted and recounted all the Poles, Ukrainians and inhabitants of the Soviet Baltic Republics and indicated the territories subject to immediate colonization, suggested "a counter figure".

The cannibals' appetites were growing — 31 million people no longer seemed enough.

"Consequently, the total population of the above-mentioned regions (subject to immediate settling by German colonists — *Authors.*) is 51 million people. The number of people that are according to the plan subject to eviction should actually be much larger than envisaged. Only if one reckons that approximately 5-6 million Jews living on this territory will be exterminated before the eviction is carried out can one agree with the figure stated in the plan — 45 million local inhabitants of non-German descent. However, it is clear from the plan that the stated 45 million people also include the Jews. Hence the conclusion can be drawn that the plan proceeds from apparently wrong evaluation of the size of the population.

"...If we bear in mind that, as envisaged by the plan, some 14 million local inhabitants will remain

in the afore-mentioned territories, a total of 46-51 million people must be evicted." ²⁵

The Russians and Byelorussians were not included in this figure, and one can imagine what Auschwitzes and Khatyns the nazis had in mind for them!

The above-mentioned document makes reference to the opinion of Professor Doctor Abel of Rosenberg's department. "Abel saw only two solutions to the problem: extermination of the Russian people or germanization of those Russians with obvious nordic features. These highly important propositions deserve the closest attention. It is not merely a question of destroying a state with Moscow as its capital. The attainment of this historic goal would in no way signify a complete solution to the problem. The essential thing is to destroy the Russians as a nation." ²⁶

One of the paragraphs of this document is entitled "On the Question of the Byelorussians".

"According to plan, 75 per cent of the Byelorussian population are to be evicted from the territory they now occupy. It follows that, in keeping with the plan of the Central Department of Imperial Security, 25 per cent of the Byelorussians are to be germanized." ²⁷

Byelorussia learned from the experience of its hundreds of Khatyns what this "eviction" really meant. These 31 or 51 million people were to suffer the same fate as further hundreds of millions, who were counted and recounted by the meticulous bureaucrats of bloodthirsty German imperialism.

All this was in accordance with the General plan "Ost" and Hitler's plans for "a final settlement in Europe", the nazi doctrine of a struggle for "Lebensraum in the East" and numerous other variants of this strategic, imperialist, cannibalistic "plan". The different concrete, "tactical" plans for combating "active elements" and the in-

evitable resistance of the Soviet people to occupation, enslavement and extermination were based on this plan and connected with it. These concrete plans served one and the same aim of exterminating civilian population under the pretext of fighting partisans so as to have less work to do later on...

After the inhabitants of Bakanikha village in Vitebsk Region were all herded into a house, an officer walked in, had them stripped of whatever good clothes they were wearing and threw them out through the door. He then recalled something else. Here is how old **Arkhip Zhigachev** described it:

"Then that officer bade us farewell, and said: "Good-bye. You have those partisans of yours to thank!"

He must have said it in an injured tone, convinced that somebody was at fault before him, an SS man – all those women and children! Perhaps they had brothers, fathers or husbands fighting in the partisans' detachments. And he, poor thing, had had to drive through the dense dark forest and make his way through the marshes trembling with fright for all that he was wearing a uniform with the dreadful skull and crossed bones emblem, and looking around all the time, in fear of partisans' ambush. The overall "plan" that had been formulated on high: everything necessary was to be done to reduce the number of men, women and children in the Eastern territories by so and so many per cents – this racist plan acquired an aura of even self-defence in the mind and under the uniform of such a killer. He was only doing his best to save himself from the partisans!...

It was alleged that the High Command, too, issued its monstrous orders only to save its soldiers and communications. Finally, even the führers themselves began to feel insulted by the

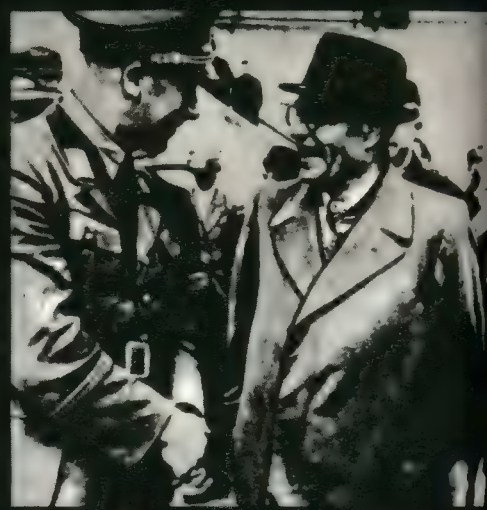
behaviour of the population of Byelorussia and other occupied territories. And no wonder! Was it not God the Creator who was guiding the Führer's will, intuition and hand, telling him what to do and how?

"Destiny itself seemed to wish to point out the way to us... This colossal Empire in the east is ripe for dissolution."²⁸

"A historical revision on a unique scale has been imposed on us by the Creator..."²⁹

And here were these partisans, these "non-Aryans" who were hindering the nazis' mission, offering resistance both at the front and in the rear, unwilling for their Motherland to be erased from the face of the world and their children and families to be "evicted" to kingdom come. There was not merely wrath and cruelty but also a feeling of being injured by "those" Russians, "those" Byelorussians, Ukrainians and Poles, all those who refused to submit to the fate determined by the "man of destiny". New orders directed at exterminating entire nations were assuming an ever more anti-partisan character. With growing, albeit vain, persistence, the nazis tried to shift the responsibility for their plans and actions on the partisans, those who were hindering the realization of these plans.

Amazingly enough, these insolent and stupid complaints by butchers against their victims can still be heard today in some countries. They appear in the memoirs and research of generals old and new, in the works of historians, politicians and writers, who keep harping on "the unlawful nature of partisans' actions", complaining about children, women and their husbands and brothers, who as partisans defended their Motherland, their way of life and the very life and future of their children. The West German Professor K. H. Pfeffer even declares that the Hitlerites "left fairly good memories of themselves





Von Gottberg, one of the butchers in Byelorussia.
The chief "mutt" —Radoslaw Ostrowski.

Oskar Dirlewanger, the killer of Khatyn, whose extermination
battalion killed or burnt alive more than 120,000 Byelorussian
villagers—men, women and children



among the Soviet people". So that's how it is! But Pfeffer also complains that the last years of the war were "nearly everywhere darkened by the unlawful actions of the partisans".³⁰

How much offence and regret! No less than shown by the bandit in officer's uniform who wiped out the residents of Bakanikha. He did not forget to take the best of their clothing (so as not to squander the Reich's property) and, following Pfeffer's logic, reproached the people whom he was about to burn: "This is for your partisans!"

Still more offended at their victims were the traitors, the village elders and *polizeis*, *Vlasovites*, *Banderovites* and the leaders of the "Byelorussian Rada"! They (as has become apparent today) had their own plans and calculations when they helped the nazis to exterminate their fellow-countrymen, Soviet people. With the help of the Germans, they "only" wanted to stamp the Bolshevik spirit out of the people. And it was not their fault, they reasoned, that "body" and "spirit" were so closely bound together. "Well, go ahead and perish if that's the way you are!" they raged at the people.

The nazis shed quite a lot of people's blood through their agency. Wherever they could, they hid behind these traitors. When the so-called "Byelorussian Rada of Confidence" was set up, the invaders came forth with the following statements and reasoning: "...the Russians will regard this as a fiction but it will allow us to carry out all measures ... through their agency and make them responsible for everything..."³¹

It sometimes happened, however, that the machine of destruction which they served with all the diligence of traitors, sadists and outcasts grabbed them and ground them in its maw with the rest. Just as in Borki, where the *polizeis* were burned together with the other villagers.

In telling us about it, **Ganna Mikitovna**

Sinitza was full of contempt for the base obtuseness of the nazi henchmen.

QUESTION: "What happened when they gathered all the *polizeis*?"

"Well, we didn't have a single *polizei* in our settlement but there was one from Dzerzhinsky. He was walking up and down the street and my brother wanted to ask him why the Germans had rounded us up and what would become of us. He said: 'Kostik, Kostik, what does it all mean?'

"But he wouldn't so much as answer. He must have thought to himself 'We are going to be taken to Germany, while you will be killed so why should I bother to speak to you?' Well, they were told this: 'Gather your families and we will take you away to Germany.' So they got their families together and brought them to the school building. Now this is what the Germans did: they locked up all their families and them, too, in the school shed and set it on fire. They all burned to death. The Germans at least killed us before burning our bodies, but these they burned alive. So much for much."

QUESTION: "We were told that the *polizeis* had run away when the Germans took them to fight the partisans."

"Yes, they ran off somewhere near Klichev. They had already gone to fight the partisans but then suddenly ran away. Perhaps the Germans thought they were in some way connected with the partisans and that was why they killed off all those *polizeis*."

QUESTION: "Did they run away just because they were afraid or were they really connected with the partisans?"

"Aw, they were not in the least connected. They were always threatening people so and pouncing upon them that it couldn't possibly be they were connected. One of them, for instance,

would come to spend the night at our place. We had nobody but women in the house. 'Just you hint to somebody that I'm here and I'll kill you on the spot,' he'd threaten. They were hiding, afraid that the partisans might find them. Hiding in other people's houses..."

* * *

The residents of Borki Kirovskiye were killed on June 15, 1942. Some months earlier, in March, many villages with their inhabitants were wiped out in Oktyabrsky District. The whole district was enclosed in a noose by several divisions which killed the entire population — village after village. This continued on an ever more ominous scale and threatened the very existence of our people, until Byelorussia was finally liberated by the Soviet Army and the partisans.

In regions and territories which were named the "Army rear" on German maps (such as Vitebsk, Mogilyov and Gomel regions and the eastern part of Minsk Region), entire divisions and large army units were usually involved in these "actions", "executions", "mass campaigns", "checkings", "special measures", "filtrations", etc.

In the west of the republic, especially in those parts which were already included in or were soon to become part of the future "German Reich", specialized groups and units were permanently busy "evicting" and "resettling" the native population. Of course, they were backed by army units, and during the blockades of the Byelovezhskaya Pushcha (Byelaya Vezha. — *Ed.*) Forest Reserve and other areas Wehrmacht divisions took part in the operations.

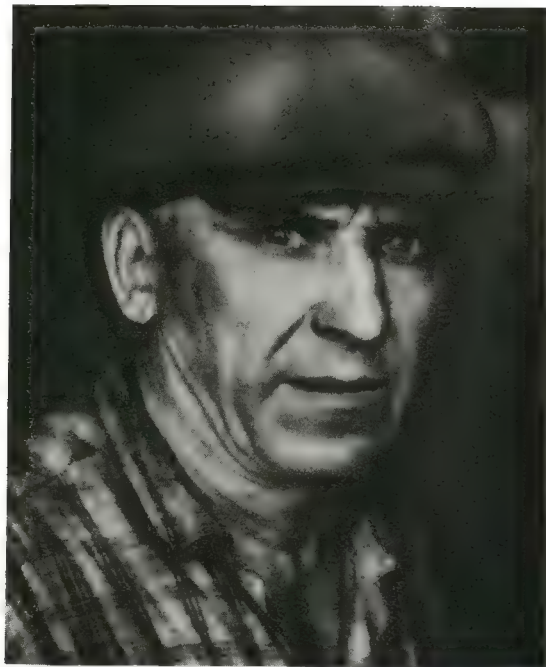
The Nuremberg trial incontrovertibly proved the guilt and responsibility for the numerous acts of genocide not only of the specialized SS units,

the SD and the police but also of the army units and the command. They did one and the same job, the only difference being that Wehrmacht had urgent things to attend to at the front as well, while the specialized teams acted as if "the final settlement" was already at hand, in other words, as if the Germans had already won the war. Consequently, the actions of these teams, groups and specialized units can be viewed as a rehearsal for the ominous "final settlement in Europe" (the extermination of the Slavs and other peoples) in which Hitler would have involved entire armies had he scored victory.

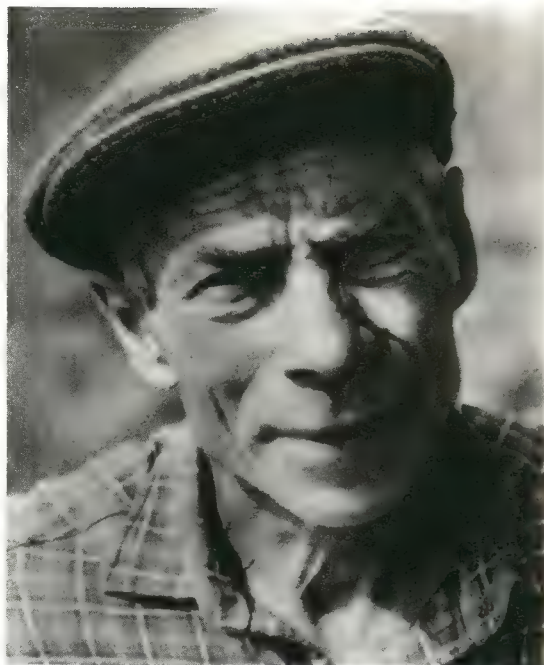
In the meantime, while thousands upon thousands of civilians were being exterminated by army and specialized units, things were also being done with an eye to the future — systematically and with maniacal persistence. "Mass execution" methods were being tested. New variants were being sought, and "mistakes" and inaccuracies taken into account. (And all the while reports were being written and sent to Berlin.) The psychology of the victims, as well as of their executioners, was being studied.

Let us now return to the living, direct witnesses.

Here is how the inhabitants of Niz village in Slonim District were killed. And how the Germans altered their method in the process, trying to find a more suitable one so that the people would stand under fire "without much ado" (for the executioners, that is). In the Auschwitzes there was an adjusted and smoothly functioning machine (fake "bathhouses" and "prison hospitals" for arriving trains of victims, etc.). But here there were no barbed-wire fences or "bathhouses", so each time the murderers thought up new ways of deceiving their victims in order to kill them all if possible, without letting anyone get away.



Ivan Garodka



Polikarp Shakunov

Levon Sidorovich Alizar

“...It happened on December 16, 1942. They arrived about... The sun had not yet risen — it must’ve been about eight or seven. They came in a truck and placed sentries round the village. Then they went to the elder’s place. We had a local elder here. They made the round of the houses with the elder saying that they were going to check everyone’s papers. Of course, they did nothing of the sort. They just gathered all the men between sixteen and forty-five. Those who were forty-six they wouldn’t take. They said they were taking us out to work and told us to bring along shovels and some bread ... in bags. We all went out. They got together all the young and middle-aged people and led us out of the village. Then they stopped along the sides of the road and across

the middle in the shape of the letter ‘L’. Then we all understood they had something wrong in mind. Some of us lit a cigarette, others rushed about. We didn’t do any digging. We had all carried bread along in bags. They had told us to take enough bread to last us for two days. Somewhat later a car drove up from the forest. It was a German car with one of their high-ups. He said to all those young people:

“‘Harness the horses and come along.’

“Naturally it was all a mask. Some laid a plow or a harrow on their carts, harnessed the horses; people were told to get in. I, too, harnessed my horse. One of the lads climbed in, but after checking my papers they said: ‘Go home!’ There were two Germans and one said, ‘Get in!’ and the other, ‘Go home!’ Well, after that, of course, they herded us into houses in four different places. Our



village had fifty houses or maybe more, and they killed two hundred and ninety-six people in all.

"Well, when they drove me in to that house everyone was already gathered there. They gathered the men as if they needed them for work and the women — in the houses to kill. I was the last to be brought in, so I stood in the doorway. There was nobody after me... There were a hundred and fifty people in that one house. Not more than twenty minutes or so passed when they called three of us out of the house. We went. As soon as we walked out they took us behind the shed. When we got there we saw their scheme: three Germans to take care of the three of us.

"They commanded: 'Down on your knees!'

"As soon as they said: 'Down on your knees!' they fired from their pistols all at once. Aimed at our heads. The bullet hit me in the back of my

head and came out here. After that they began bringing out more people. We were already... those other two were killed outright — never so much as moved. But I wasn't knocked out. Had I been they would've finished me off, but fortunately I was conscious. I heard ringing in my head as if somebody had smacked me on the ear.

"I fell on my face, and lay there motionless, holding my breath.

"Then, perhaps in a couple of minutes, more people toppled on top of us. Those people just walked behind the shed, saw us lying there, and only had time to say, 'Oh!' before they were shot down.

"I could only think of what would happen when they would begin to finish off those who fell down at once. They might finish me off as well. They started firing the moment someone rounded

the shed. I couldn't even recognize their voices, for I was not at my end of the village but the one nearer Slonim, where the Germans had brought me. They'd just come behind the shed, crying: 'Mummy, daddy!' and were shot right down.

"More and more bodies piled on top of us, they'd killed them all..."

"Then all was peace and quiet. I lay there till it was almost midnight. Pigs began to root among the corpses. Dead bodies pressed down my head but my legs were free..."

"They lay on top of my head and I couldn't tell whom they had brought along, all I heard was children crying 'Oh! Oh!' I just couldn't tell. The pigs began to root among the bodies, drinking their blood, and they stepped on my legs. I realized then the Germans had left and began to struggle out.

"I climbed out from under those bodies and raised my head. There was also this Bardun, who also got up. He also found a little girl under her mother. She was slightly wounded and is still alive now, that girl. She must've been about ten then. She lay among the corpses. There was also another man who had been hiding in a house. He came over and saw us moving. So we got out and made for the forest. Well, it began to snow of course, so I took a warm shawl that had belonged to one of the dead women, wrapped up my head, my wounds, and we all went into the forest.

"We went into the forest and the snow fell all day long. We wandered till evening and then returned to see what was left of the village. I could no longer... I was all swollen and couldn't hear a thing, so I plodded along, my blood trickling down, and nothing to eat, only water.

"I came home, sorted through the bodies and found my children.

"My four children were killed — three boys and a girl.

"And my wife as well..."

In Garodki (Dyatlovo District, Grodno Region) they applied different methods. They arrived, encircled the village and set up machine-guns all around so nobody could escape. After that they walked from house to house ordering people to come and have their papers checked. **Ivan Vikentyevich Garodka** recalls that they were told to bring along the list of the members of their families. That was the procedure in West-Byelorussian villages which were closer to the "Reich" — each house was supposed to have a family list. So that there would be no strangers! Everyone was to be listed by name. They brought out a table and benches — quite a "peaceful" bureaucratic procedure.

"...They stood there with their tommy-guns," Ivan Garodka begins his story. "This German asked the headman in Polish:

"'Will there be vacant flats for us...?'

"'There will be.'

"As soon as he said 'will be' ...the Germans started to shoot. They didn't begin shooting until he said this thing about those flats. This was a sort of sign for them, a command. But the headman didn't know it. He, too, was killed. And so were his brothers and his wife, and children, all of them..."

"When they started shooting I ran off.

"Only three of us survived then..."

"Later our whole village was burned to ashes. Three hundred and sixty people had been killed then in Garodki. In our family they killed the father (our mother died before), three of my sisters and my little brother..."

They acted differently in Khotenovo (Smolevichi District, Minsk Region). After they arrived they walked down the street, leaving three killers standing at each house. They let people into the village until there were "enough". Then at a signal from two flares each group of three entered "their" house and shot down "their" family.

"...They placed three Germans in every yard so as to have all the people killed in a moment. At each house. They came in dozens then! They had already taken away our cattle by the time, drove it away. Other Germans did it, but these fired two flares, at this and that end of the village. Then they entered each house and killed the children and all the rest, all the old women... They killed my mother, my wife and three children. My son was born in thirty-six, my daughter in thirty-eight and my youngest was born in nineteen forty. They all lay in the corner, in a heap. There were some bullets there and everything... I came later and could only bury the corpses of my dear ones. They had set the place on fire. I buried those whose bodies remained. My wife and my mother... As for the children, I found nothing but their bones.

"They killed a hundred and eighty people..."

(**Ivan Vasilyevich Likhtarovich** from Khotenovo Village.)

In the village of Zasovye, Logoisk District, the butchers spent the night and even had a party with a harmonica playing. Early the next morning they made the rounds of the village. Mothers and all the rest of the women were busy with their cooking so they were the first to be shot. Next the Germans entered the rooms where the children were still asleep...

This is what **Sabina Petrovna Shupletsova** told us about this.

"... The Germans came to our village and put up for the night. Early in the morning, when some of the folks were still in bed, they started killing people. The evening before they didn't tell people anything. They killed them right in their houses, shooting down even those at whose place they had spent the night, for they were in a mood to kill. I was at my neighbour's then. They said they were going to take people away to Germany, but if any of the young people escaped they would kill their old folks. We didn't want our old people to suffer on our account. So I went over to one girl, hoping that we would at least be together if we had to go to Germany. I had been there for only a little while when we saw the Germans coming. To kill. Three of them went into their house, while another stood in the street. As I walked along he only asked me where my house was. I said: 'Over there.'"

QUESTION: "What language did he speak?"

"Well, he spoke our language but you could tell he was a German, he spoke different.

"So I walked back home. Then we saw the village was on fire. We realized we must run off. We were running down the street when this German saw us — he was hiding behind a house where they had dug in a machine-gun. We also saw him and started to run along another road. Finally we reached the barn. There was a stream nearby.

"There were two lads and they said to my mother:

"'Auntie, let's drown ourselves.'

"There was this little stream there, you see. But my mother said: 'Children, we'll beg them for mercy and perhaps they'll let us go!'

"This German fired at us once and went back.

"We children darted out onto the covered porch one after another, our Mother was behind us... He fired at her at once. I heard her scream, and he fired again... That was all. It became quiet... A baby was lying in a cradle and he came up and fired at it... And in the newspapers they wrote: 'Partisans'... They spread the papers everywhere: 'Five hundred and fifty partisans have been destroyed...'"

*From Lydia Artyomova's story.
Studyonka Village, Bykhov District,
Mogilyov Region*





But then they started to fire at us with the machine-gun. I was wounded and we all tumbled down into the bog...

"These boys were still little..."

"It was a small stream, it's no longer there..."

They surrounded Studyonka in Bykhov District early in the morning and drove through the village on trucks carrying guns; they stayed on the village outskirts near the windmill until noon, then they walked into the village in formation. Two or three Germans would leave the column to enter the yards.

"Get into your house! Lie down!..."

After they had killed five hundred of the Studyonka people they moved on to the nearby Studenets settlement. The aviation was at work while they washed their hands at the well and had a meal – Studyonka was set ablaze from planes which had received a gun signal from the execution squad. No doubt they could have coped with the task themselves as they usually did, but this time they wanted a change. They wanted to make sure which way was more efficient. There was also a purely psychological motive – their desire to show off their fighting equipment and might. After the show was over they returned to Studyonka to set fire to whatever remained after the air attack.

(From the recollections of **Lydia Karpovna Artyomova.**)

It was done in an equally horrifying way in different villages and areas – although just as automatically, the nazis did their ugly job with a sadistic sneer on their faces. How they revelled in their "finds" and "variants" as if boasting in front of each other of their ingenuity in discovering new

ways of exterminating people – burning them alive, dump them into pits or wells, telling them it was only a question of "checking papers" or "taking them to Germany"!

"...On May 28, at two in the afternoon, they killed people.

"They summoned us..."

"Well, told us to get together for a meeting. I was in my house then. 'There'll be a change of passports,' they said.

"Well, we all went. They had already killed all the people who lived at the other end but we, our part of the village, knew nothing about it. They said there was going to be a meeting so off we went.

"When we walked into that yard we saw all these people lying killed. We were brought straight there. There was a shed here and a bath-house there. These three, who specially killed people, stood there. With tommy-guns. And they wore leather mittens. Wearing nothing but an undershirt and mittens... The mittens were very, very long (*shows how long*).

"You want to know how they killed people? They shot at the head... I saw with my own eyes how they killed my mother, then my brother's wife and her child – all of them..."

"As for me, the German pushed me out of the way, gave me a shove... That was what they did with the younger folks whom they were going to take to Germany..."

(**Antonina Ivanovna Ikan,** Ikany Village, Borisov District, Minsk Region.)

They were "inventive" in thinking up new "variants", but still, when they saw their victims had no escape, they did not bother to hide their

intentions. "Go to the meeting!", "A change of passports", they would say. But the people had already heard about these horrible "meetings" and being "sent to work"...

At the bottom of all these variants, these "meetings" and "passport changes" lay the refined sadism of the butchers, cunning and mockery.

But there was also something else. Something that was written down and emphasized in the reports by "führers" of the "Einsatzkommand" and "Sonderkommand" and which was later filed and studied at the top – in Berlin.

* * *

In Mogilyov Region, Bykhov District, there is a large village called Krasnitsa. We came there on a bright sunny day in July 1972 – exactly thirty years after its inhabitants were killed by the nazis. Krasnitsa goes on living just as Hiroshima does today.

But its memory, too, still lives – the memory of its own death. For those of the Krasnitsa inhabitants who managed to survive, this one day is like a flash of horror and suffering as compared to which the harassing war months and years that followed seemed just a blur. There was "before" and "after", and above it all hovered that July day in 1942.

"They marched through the village doing no one any harm. They came from over there, through the cemetery. Only when one of the men tried to get away did they seize him:

"'You a partisan?' they asked.

"'No.'

"And they let him go. That was their tactic – to calm people down. Yes... Well, they set-

tled down in the village. They also drove to Bykhov to find out which of the two Krasnitsa villages – the First or the Second – they were to kill. They cleared the matter up in Bykhov and returned to surround our whole village. Placed Germans with rifles and machine-guns all round the place. There were also polizeis with them. When they drove people into a house they would give orders in Russian:

"'Come on,' they'd say, 'Get in!'

"'Well, our folks were too slow-witted. They just walked in and that was that.'

QUESTION: "Hadn't you heard then about people being killed in the neighbourhood?"

"Not before that time. We had heard nothing of such things.

"Well, so they began to herd people into houses. They would drive them in, and move on, setting houses on fire as they went. Houses full of people! Houses are burning! Meanwhile, other villagers were coming in from the meadow, bringing in hay, and the Germans, those who stood on guard, those sentries started to make fun of them. They found it very amusing that these people were voluntarily going to their death. But how could these people know? They were merely talking to each other: 'They must be fighting the partisans and we had better run away before it gets hot here, too.' When the Germans had just come their commandant made it clear that there should be no cattle – nor people, for that matter – in the fields. Neither in the fields, nor in the forest. Because, he said, there were going to be clashes with the partisans and anybody found out there would be killed. Those in the village, however, would be spared. Naturally, all the people hurried to the village. They ran and ran in from every direction. And they had no idea that they were going to be herded into houses and killed. Yes, killed and burned to ashes.

"That's the whole story."

QUESTION: "What about you? Were you with the rest?"

"Six of us walked along with scythes in our hands. Well, eight Germans came our way.

"Throw those scythes of yours over the fence," they ordered.

"So we did as told. If I had known then what I know now I would have swung at the guy with my scythe — he wouldn't have had time to shoot — and I'd have carried his head clean off with that scythe. But we were stupid then, I should say. That was that. We hadn't learned yet. Couldn't guess what was really going on."

QUESTION: "What were they wearing?"

"Uniforms. Yes... We were coming back from the meadow and saw those sentries laughing. What were they laughing about — how could we know? Then as we walked down the street we met those others who were driving the people inside and killing them.

"Halt!" they said. "Turn back! Throw those scythes of yours over the fence!"

"We did as we were told.

"Everything around was burning."

QUESTION: "Could you hear people shouting and screaming?"

"We could hear nothing at all. Nothing at all but the shooting, and the houses were burning at this end of the village. Yes. Well, they made us stop and said:

"Get into this house."

"We entered the house and saw it was crammed full. That same moment a grenade came flying in — bang! It exploded. What shouting broke out! Then they threw in another one! And a third! After the third grenade all became silent."

QUESTION: "What did you do at this moment?"

"I saw him at the door pulling the pin out of a grenade.

"Fall flat! He's throwing a grenade!"

"I only just had time to throw myself down, some others did, too, — when he hurled the grenade. A boy whose stomach was blown open — the grenade exploded right in front of him — flung himself at me and his head hit mine. When they threw the third grenade in and it went off — all was silent. The smoke became thinner and a German, or, perhaps, a polizei, walked in and began to check the bodies. He finished off whoever was still alive. As he pulled at this little boy — he was still alive — the boy half-opened his eyes and he fired at him. His head was over mine so I merely got it through my cap. The bullet did me no harm. From this whole group only two of us weren't wounded; I wasn't wounded, it doesn't count that my cap had been shot through and some of my hair shaved off. Two others were wounded. All the rest were dead. There must have been about forty or fifty people there, I can't say for sure."

QUESTION: "Did you lie there for a long time?"

"No, the moment they left... I didn't lose consciousness, so I heard him leaving... He'd left... Was gone... I hear them talk, out in the street... Well, as soon as they were in the street I got to my feet. I looked around — not a soul, all lying about! I asked in a whisper:

"Is there anybody alive?"

"Sure", says a voice.

"I'm alive."

"Another one said: 'I'm wounded but alive.'"

"What were we to do? Yes... We decided to climb up to the attic. So we squirmed up. There was a hole up there, yes... So I watched.

'They walked into a house. Then they went on...

"I says: 'They'll set the whole place on fire and we'll burn in here.'

"'They won't do that!'

"'What do you mean they won't? Look at the smoke, something's on fire.'

"Well, we jumped down and dashed into the vegetable patch. There was barley growing there, so we hid in it. Yes. We crawled through this barley. Then across a meadow and into the rye field. The sentry wasn't looking our way then. And we made for the forest."

QUESTION: "Did you have a family then?"

"They were all killed. In short, out of my family, my brother's children too – I had brothers and sisters – twenty five were killed then. My wife, too, was killed..."

Polikarp Mikolayevich Shakunov witnessed all this. We met him in Krasnitsa, leading his horse from pasture, perhaps just as he did on that other day thirty years before. We stopped him to ask if there was anyone left who could tell us "how people were killed".

"Yes," he said. "Some survived. I'm one."

The door of the club was unlocked for us and while Polikarp Mikolayevich told his story other inhabitants of the former, the ravaged, Krasnitsa gathered around. They came one by one. They sat along the wall by the windows and listened in silence to what they had themselves witnessed and experienced.

857 people were killed in Krasnitsa then...

Lizaveta Ananyevna Shkaptsova

"How it was... Well, early in the morning

I drove the cow out to pasture. A plane flew in right where my house was – and trundled along over the mound, over the ground.

"I said then: 'What does it mean – a plane rolling across the field?'

"It rolled and rolled and then took off and flew away."

QUESTION: "Do you mean it landed there?"

"No, it didn't actually land. It just went round and round in circles right above the ground. Yes, a little later I drove my cow out – and there they were coming from the eastern side, moving in a chain.

"'Oh, where are we to go?' I said. 'What's going to happen here?'

"Well, they came closer. True, they didn't harm us as they went by. Not when they went by – you could only tell it was them by the way they marched.

"Then I kindled the stove. Began heating it. Well, when I was through with the job we went to the marsh to make hay. As we were walking to the marsh we saw those trucks coming – eight trucks – and beginning to round up our whole village. But I'd left my little boy at home. So I thought: the child will be scared. And I said:

"'So what, are we going or not? (There were men with us, too.) Well, menfolk, shall we go back to the village?'

"'What else can we do? Let's go.'

"Well then, so we got together and went on. Three lads went first. They let them pass. Then four of us went ahead. We came up. The sentry sitting there began shouting something. We were going to run off but he began waving his hand like this! We took off but he gestured: 'Don't run!' And really, where could we run to when they were shooting like mad there. So he made us turn back.



Lizaveta Shkaptsova



Volga Nadtocheyeva



"...In ten years, when the tasks of that time will need their performers, we'll have choice personnel."

Hitler. 1941

He sent us to the Perepechinov's house. We came up.

QUESTION: "Was he trying to make you return so you wouldn't go?"

"So we shouldn't go there..."

QUESTION: "Who was he – a German or a polizei?"

"No, he was a Russian. He talked Russian. One of them sat close so he said to my man:

"Come over here."

"My man came over."

"Did they do any killing here?"

"No."

"Was there any shooting?"

"No, there wasn't."

"Did they ever come to the village?"

"No, never."

"Well, that was all he said. So we went on."

"Then he said:

"Go to the left."

"We turned left and approached – there were carts and horses standing there. I thought I'd go into the house. But when I came closer – oh, oh! People were moaning in there! I couldn't go into that house. 'Oh, oh!' I was turning back when six of them came up..."

"Get into the house! Quick, quick!"

"So we ran into the house."

"Your papers!" – to the men. My man handed over his paper. They threw it away at once. And said:

"Lie onto the floor, face down!"

"So all of us... Lay down. And then... He was standing on the threshold and we lay here on the floor. He started shooting and fired and fired on. With dum-dums, with all sorts of bullets. I heard – bullets hit my shoulders. Well. It doesn't begin to hurt at once. When it hits you – you feel no pain. I only felt my blood running, drip-ping!

"I stayed where I was."

"Many others were done in like that..."

"Nobody said a thing. Both the hit ones and the killed ones kept mum..."

"He stopped shooting, must've had his fill. Then he said:

"Kaputt! Come on."

"So they gathered their things and left. I raised my head. My old man was shot in the head and another lad who lay there was also shot in the head. An elderly man was lying close to us – he wasn't killed, but his son, a handsome lad, was. So this elderly man got to his feet."

"And another woman, Dunya Knyazeva by name, says:

"Let's go too."

"No, I am not going," I says. 'I'll stay until the house begins to burn.'

"Then she peeped out of the window:

"Nobody there. Come along."

"I said: 'No, you go along, I'll stay here. Anyway my old man is killed, so I'll lie by his side.'

"Then they all got going and I thought: I better go too. But as soon as I moved two boys and three girls followed me. They were wounded, all of them. So they crawled after me. I went out into the yard and looked around – nobody to be seen. So I – there was a sort of picket fence there – so I decided to hide in the barley field. I lifted some pickets and wanted to squeeze through. But my side got terribly painful. Still, I managed to make it to the other side of the fence. I crawled into the barley. Those children – they followed as if they'd been stuck to me."

"I said: 'Spread out, kids!'

"But none of them moved apart. We lay like this till evening. We were sleepy and cold and no longer knew who was alive and who was dead. Then this here Andrei Perepechin comes along

and asks us something. I heard his voice, got to my feet. How thankful I was — he bandaged me up. (*She points to Perepechin.*) They gave me a sweater and I put it on... And then the house burned down, low down to the ground... I wanted to rush there, to where my man lay in the fire. But Andrei pushed me away from the fire and said:

“‘Go away from here, go home!’

“But my yard was at least half a kilometre away. I asked people: ‘Has anyone seen my son?’ and some said ‘yes’ while others said ‘no’... Well, then we went off to the marsh. We sat in the marsh for a long time. Wasn’t it cold there! And us were wounded and covered with blood. Then we went off to Lezhanka. We went to Lezhanka where we were bandaged, undressed — all my clothes, soaked in blood — I was covered with blood all over, you see, head and all...”

Volga Mefodyevna Nadtocheyeva

“Well, there was already no place to hide. Mother and I lost time fussing about and now it was too late to hide. There were six children, one smaller than the other. We could already see a car approaching and men in cockaded caps sitting in it. They stopped close by and asked:

“‘In what direction did the partisans shoot?’

“Mother said that we didn’t know anything and didn’t see no partisans.

“‘Well,’ he said, ‘you’ll be sure to see better in another two hours!...’

“Mother returned and says:

“‘What was it he meant?’

“Well, then they surrounded the village, placed those patrollers of theirs and started shooting. We’d only just started running to the forest when

they began to fire their machine-guns. My mother, you see, had little children on her hands — so where were we to go? The older ones scattered in different directions and we four younger ones remained — I was the oldest of ‘em. Well, my mother sat hiding in the potato rows, though the potato stalks were still very low, and we crouched by her side. Soon they came up to our house, one of ‘em came behind the shed and fired away.

“I stood there leaning against the wall like this and says:

“‘Mummy, I’ll run away!’

“So she says: ‘I don’t know, dear, run ahead if you want, I can’t keep you here by force. Do as you want... Run ahead.’

“I was ready to run away but I felt as if someone was holding me back, I couldn’t tear myself away from the wall, I was so scared. Well, they all ran off and were all shot to death.”

QUESTION: “You mean those girls?”

“Yes, two of the girls. All of them. Shot them all in the head. When I rushed out I saw them. And then my mother... He fired at my mother. She held her three-year-old daughter in her arms — he wounded her first. I was watching so I saw her stretch out and begin screaming. Mother raised her higher up in her arms and she turned all blue, awfully blue, but I didn’t see any blood, nothing. Then a German came towards mother.

“I said: ‘Mother, dear, I’ll run into the house. I’m afraid.’

“She says: ‘Run ahead, darling.’

“It was then they killed Mother. And those two girls. But the little boy, he was scared and hid someplace in the house and was burned there alive. I ran to a neighbour’s house. No, I was still running when he rushed at me:

“‘That’s where you’re hiding, you little bastard! Get into the house,’ he said.

“I went running but my whole body felt stiff as a log. When I ran into the house there were those bodies lying around, ten of them, killed. Oh, goodness! I was scared to death. Then a lot of children came running into the house. And they all hid under the bed.”

QUESTION: “Do you mean the children?”

“Yes, those children. There was no place for me left there as I was late, so I lay at the edge. I thought: ‘They’ll all stay alive but I’ll surely be killed ‘cause I am on the outside.’ But then he came up to the bed and pushed it aside! So since I lay near the edge I was now hidden under the bed and those others who lay by the wall were all killed. I lay there alive. I lay and the bed covers hid me so they didn’t see me. From a revolver they finished off those who were still moving. I still lay there...”

“Then all was quiet, nobody already... I lifted my head and he was standing on the threshold with his tommy-gun like this, smoking a cigarette. He rushed towards me at once, turned up the cover on the bed and began to fire at me. He fired **three** times, missed twice, but one bullet hit me. He must’ve aimed at my temple but the bullet hit me a little lower – I still have a little scar there. I lay curled up in a ball and the bullet hit my knee. Well, when I saw my blood running I thought: am I alive and in my senses? For sure this is the end, I thought...”

Pyotr Yuryevich Perepechin

“I was only a boy then. There were four of us, little ones on my mother’s hands. My brother born in ’twenty-six who remained alive, my sister born in ’thirty-three and another brother born in ’thirty-seven. Our dad died in ’thirty-seven. My



elder brother went to hide in the barley and it was then that Maria Bobkova came running by. She lives in Mogilyov now. She was a young girl. She darted out... We used to be classmates. She ran along shouting:

“‘Run off, hide someplace, they’re killing everyone in sight!’

“I began to beg my mother saying that we’ve got to go and hide ourselves.

“But mother was either at a loss what to do or something:

“‘We won’t go anywhere,’ she said.

“Well, then I began to urge her to let me take a younger brother or sister so we, the two of us, could go away.

“But she wouldn’t allow me to take and says:

“‘Go alone if that’s what you want.’

“Well, later, at the time when we... We saw already that they were moving here, so we entered our yard, went there, to the shed and sat along the fence – I was the last in the row. Two of ‘em came in. One spoke German and the other Russian, the one who spoke Russian was holding



Maria Pavlova (Bobkova)

Ivan Perepechin

Pyotr Perepechin

a rifle and the other a pistol. He stood by the entrance.

"The one who spoke Russian came in. He was one of them turncoats, of course.

"Go into house and lie down!"

"Then my mother fell to her knees and we too started begging: 'Masters, sirs!' and all that sort of thing... Well, then he wanted to hit me with the butt of his rifle. I got to my feet at once and walked ahead. I was the first and my sister, the one who was born in 'thirty-three, followed me. I walked ahead — we had two houses, you see — so I made for the second house while my mother with the boy born in 'thirty-seven — went to the other house. He immediately... Mother was shot dead at once. My brother suffered for a long time. Then this German came in and shot my sister at once... The bullet hit me in the shoulder and came out here. I lay there ... my eyes shut. I felt my blood running out. I lay there, who knows, I supposed — I had read some books — there is blood, so I thought: would I die soon or not? Well, then they... There was father's — a sort of suitcase — oh, a little trunk standing there. They

dumped all the best things out of it, examined them all and rummaged in them and then flung them here right in the blood... Then they walked out of the house, left, that is.

"I got up, turned this sister of mine over — she was dead. Mother lay there — also dead. I lifted my brother in my arms, carried him awhile. He died, too. I placed him on mother's arm and looked out of the window — there was nobody around.

"I was walking out into the yard when I saw them letting out our cattle. Well, there was a cow and some sheep. They let them out the yard. They noticed me, but I jumped over the fence. They fired again. But I kept running and ran into elder brother of mine who was hiding in the barley. He helped me lie down and I didn't get up again. My wounds began to hurt me and I didn't get up again. Well, in short, they let out the cattle and signalled that it was time to set the house on fire. This they did. Our house burned down. We got to our feet, my brother gave me a hand. Neighbours began to gather round. Well, then we went to the forest..."

Thus one after another the inhabitants of Krasnitsa – a village once destroyed by the nazis – took their turn in front of the mike. Pyotr Perepechin was followed by the women, Eva Tumakova and Nina Knyazeva. Owing to some out-of-the-way luck these people along with several dozen other villagers survived that day. The murderers did their job – they killed and burned to death 857 people. But still it was not as “clean” a job as they were capable of and had learned to do. Here they were only mastering their methods. Because we had also seen the sites of other villages destroyed in 1943 and 1944, once large and populous (Makovyе, Osipovich District; Yamishche, Shumilino District; Puzichi, Soligorsk District, and others), where not a single soul had survived. Not a single person who could tell how it all happened. All that remained was a field, some rye and a monument in a birch grove – a small pyramid of cement carrying a three-digit figure – the number of the killed and burned – and also some invisible skylarks trying to fill up this emptiness that reached to the very sky, with their twittering. It was a special kind of emptiness which one, perhaps, does not find in the most deserted of deserts.

Krasnitsa was among the first to be ravaged in this area. True, it had been rumoured about Studyonka (also situated in Bykhov District), that all its inhabitants had been killed. But it is difficult to believe such things. Even if one has seen and experienced a lot.

The execution squads took all this into account – when people are already badly scared and know for sure what awaits them – this requires one “approach”. And quite another when the murderers could rely on special kind of state – a man sees that masses of people are being killed but he still cannot believe that this is possible...

Andrei Pilipovich Perepechin

“...It was on July 17, 1942. It was early morning and everybody was still asleep when a plane appeared over Krasnitsa. It began to circle very low over the ground and all the villagers woke up. At the time a large number of Germans approached from the direction of Davydovich. Well, they marched through Krasnitsa, doing no harm, just passed by. People paid little attention to them, and went back to their houses, or continued to do whatever they were doing. Some time later the Germans reappeared – this time from all sides. They encircled the village without saying a thing – did it all quietly sort of. And at about three o’clock in the afternoon they began to kill. Began killing from over there. From the direction of the school. They herded several people into the school and from there grenade explosions were heard. And sounds of shooting. But nothing else could be heard, no screams or anything. It is true what Shakunov said about all the villagers being out haymaking. Well, they drove the villagers in from the hay field but nobody knew what for. Then all of a sudden a girl, yes, Bobkova – Maria was her name, came running, she had jumped out of the window. She ran through the village shouting: ‘Run away, they’re killing people!...’”

In Mogilyov we found Maria Bobkova, whose terrified screams virtually awoke many to their senses then: “They’re killing people!” Now Maria Victorovna has another surname – Pavlova – her husband’s. We did not find her in the old wooden house, an address we were given in Krasnitsa: she had moved to Yubileiny neighbourhood. As a rule we first see a person, hear him and then learn about his life from his own

story. In this case, however, we were to meet a woman whose fate and life story were known to us beforehand. So without realizing it we observed her closely as if trying to recognize her — this small, thin-faced darkish woman, who looked at us with reserve, listening to why we, strangers, had bothered to come from far to see her. Krasnitsa? Yes, she visits the place quite often. Though she has lived in town for a long time now, works at the flour mill. Her husband is a fitter. Their daughter has already grown up — that's her in the kitchen, laughing loudly as only the young do — with her husband just as young as she. They're busy with their own conversation, their own interests, while their mother — if people need it! — can sit down in front of our microphone.

"...When the Germans rounded up the village our mother was haymaking, while we — my brother and three sisters — remained at home. There was a school not far from us. After they drove in they first began killing these ... the refugees. They lived there, in the school building, several families, and the Germans started shooting at them. And our neighbour, who lived there, close by, was at home then. So they were killing those people in the school house and the bullets whizzed phi-uh through the village — one could hear them flying. Then I went over to our neighbour's:

"'Oh, uncle,' I said. 'Something's going on there. They're killing people or something!'

"But he said: 'Hey, don't get panicky! Who'd think of killing you!'

"After they had shot all the people in the school house they began to comb the village. Two Germans walked along one side of the street, two along the other. Then into houses — two here and

two there. Our house was the third or fourth from the end.

"They first went to one house, but it was locked, so they went into the next.

"An old woman was running — her daughters were in the marsh — and she ran with her granddaughter. She stopped for breath and said:

"'I'll go on.'

"Then they entered the third house and killed everyone who was there."

QUESTION: "Did you hear the firing?"

"No, we didn't hear anything. They would go in and shoot inside. But we were running back and forth between our house and our neighbour's.

"Men, what are we to do?"

"It was so frightening, this firing!

"I had an elder brother and sister, I was the middle one. Well, then they were coming to our house! Goodness, two Germans!...

"There were also polizeis with them, these with badges on their chests. Real awful. They had already killed our neighbours and were moving towards us. I said: 'Oh, uncle, look — they're coming into houses and killing people. Now they're coming here!'

"Well, we just stood there and that's all. I wasn't in my own house. Two sisters were there — and they were killed. Coming here now! And me and my brother here! My brother was quite weak after an illness. If he were in better health he would've run away too. But he was very weak.

"A polizei said:

"Get into the house!"

"Oh! What are we to do?" we all cried.

"Then all of us — this man, he had a family of five, I was the sixth — at once fell flat to the floor, face down, and began to cry loudly. I don't remember now who cried what. At once they

brought out their rifles or machine-guns and began shooting at these people. When they fired the first time... There was a chest standing right by the window... When they fired the first time I jumped on top of this chest ... in a fever or something, I jumped onto the chest and the window wasn't locked — so I dashed to it. I pushed it open with my hand and ran out into the street. As I was running two Germans were going my way from the other end. They had killed people in another house and were now walking along. They babbled something but I dashed across the village to the other end. They hadn't been there yet, they began with this end. As I ran on, people were standing there and all of them asking:

“What's going on, Manya, what's going on there?”

“I said: ‘Oh, get away. The Germans are killing people!’

“Then they got into groups and scattered in different directions ... for hiding... And those who were in the marsh, our mother too, were herded into a house and some killed with grenades, while others burned alive.

“The daughter of that man I told you about also darted to the window after me but the German hit her in the shoulder and she fell back. Still she remained alive, she is now living in Brest Region.

“People say that as I ran they couldn't recognize me: I was so black and terrible! Sometimes I go there and they tell me:

“‘You've saved our lives. We would've just stood there and waited until the Germans came.’

“Later we hid in the rye field, sat in the rye.

“Then they sounded a trumpet, gave a signal and drove away...”

★ ★ ★

If you spend a long time, several years in a row, traveling, listening to and recording it all, then through the hair-raising unbelievable truth of the human stories and documents the general features of this entire phenomenon — that of the Byelorussian Khatyns — began to show up clearly.

The nazi machine of mass extermination took into consideration the factor of human psychology. The psychology of people being killed. This was true of nazi concentration camps about which a lot was said at the Nuremberg trial, and many books were written. Behind the barbed wire of the concentration camps the machine of extermination was adjusted and tried on millions of living and dead. No wonder they were called “nazi death factories”. Conditions there were stable and hardly ever changed.

In villages, on the contrary, circumstances differ each time and are constantly changing. The “extermination machine” tried to adapt itself to all this after it had inched its way out of concentration camps, out of Gestapo prison cells and crawled across Polish, Byelorussian, Russian and Ukrainian villages.

It came out face to face with man, you, for instance, your family or your fellow-villagers. You were suddenly stopped without warning in the midst of your usual occupations and told:

“Get into the house, all of you! Quick! Go in and lie down. Face to the floor!”

You, your children and your mother will be shot — right now, in another minute. Submachine-guns are aimed at you, it just remains for the trigger to be pressed...

"...When those Germans came into our house, the ones who were to shoot us, I recollect one of them was tall fellow... All wore long grey coats – with skulls on them, just like the SS men. One had a tommy-gun and the other two – pistols. When they came in... We had a crib there, also a village chest, which belonged to our grandmother, and here there was a pillow. I fell onto this pillow... When they came in I buried my face in the pillow. 'Cause my mother had told us: 'Soon as they come fall down wherever you may be...' She knew already what would happen... I lay face down on the pillow and my little sister lay at my side. She put her arms round her head and lay like this. Then they started shooting. I don't remember how it was... I just remember them shooting and how my arm gave a jerk... 'Later when I raised my head – the house was already full of smoke...'"

(**Ivan Alexandrovich Sikiritsky** from Levishche Village, now lives in the town of Slutsk.)

Or else: you are all huddled up in the middle of the house, your whole family, and he is already there – wearing a helmet, a stranger impatiently concerned with his job...

"...There were eighteen of us in the house. A cousin and her children – four of them – had come over from Litvichi. We all settled down on the straw spread over the floor and waited... One German came in and put down such machine-gun, on little legs... When he entered the house and put down the machine-gun he said something in German. I remembered then, but now I've already forgotten what he said. And then began firing at us! I lay flat on my face, and I was the

only one to stay alive... Killed everybody.

"I lay there for a long time.

"They took everything there was – heard them muttering. Saying something, but it was in German.

"I lay there and didn't move.

"And then they set fire to the place. There were a lot of icons on the wall, so they began with the icons, layed some hay on the table. An embroidered towel was hanging above the icons, so they put some hay on the table and set fire to the hay and the towel. When they left I raised my head, took a look – one corner of the house was on fire. I lay there and I could hear how they – no more than 'puck-puck' – shot people..."

(**Regina Stepanovna Gridyushka**. Zasovye Village, Logoisk District, Minsk Region.)

You are looking at all this and you see your own death that is coming for you right now!

"...Then they – bang! – killed mother from a revolver. I saw from behind the chimney – I was sitting on top of a brick stove. Mother was killed. The two younger ones, a brother and a sister, they were sleeping in bed – so they came up, uncovered them and – bang-bang-bang – right into their heads. I froze with fright – the end... I didn't rush there, just sat and thought about what would happen next... Let them climb up on the stove and kill me..."

(**Alyona Ilyinichna Batura**. Zasovye, Logoisk District.)

You've got to do something in the few seconds left to you, looking death in the face. One, lying down or falling, covers up his child with his own

body. Another, on hearing the words: "Lie down!" dashes across the house and out of the window. Still another, unarmed, flings himself at the armed German. And someone else, a man and a father, is the first to enter a house and lie down on the floor (from recollections of Nina Knyazeva of Krasnitsa village).^{*} Until the last moment one hopes for something: perhaps he thinks that by doing what he does he is giving his children some small chance. Perhaps pity will be shown for them at least! Or else he tries to hide himself and his children as fast as he can from still more terrible cruelty and bestiality – even at the price of their own life.

Nina Knyazeva recalls what her father shouted when her mother threw herself under the stove with her children:

"You'll burn alive!"

What could be more frightening for a man and father when the only thing he could do was choose a less painful death for his children?...

"...They herded us inside," Nina Knyazeva related. "Well, we went in – and then what were we to do? We began to hide behind one another... Well, they stood there too!"

"How long will we be bothered with the lot of you? Lie flat! Face down! Lie down!..."

That was their work after all – they had come to carry out the "resolution" (this was what one of them said), the "order", the "plan", and here these people are playing hide-and-seek: one hiding behind another, children hiding behind their mother. Lie down! We've no time to waste!... You're not the only ones! We're not to stand on ceremony with you!

^{*} See chapter "I Also Came from the Village of Fire".

They did their job. And sent in reports – briskly, businesslike, triumphant, detailed.

"The company was assigned to destroy the village of Zabolotye north-east of Mokransy and shoot down its population. Attached to the company were: Fron's platoon from the 9th company and ten armoured motorized men from the unit of the 10th regiment. On September 22, 1942, at about 6 p.m., the 1st, 2nd and 3d platoons reached the western exit of Mokransy on their vehicles and joined the units sent there for reinforcement. After having been given a brief outline of the situation and instructions on the deployment of forces, at 11 p.m. the company took off in the direction of Zabolotye...

"On September 23, 1942, at about 2 a.m. the company approached the first, separately standing homesteads of Zabolotye. While the main forces moved on farther to the middle of the village, towards the territory that was to be cordoned off, individual homesteads were encircled by a specially assigned team and the people were led out of the houses. In this manner about 25 men and women were detained even before we entered the village. The village elder, who lived in an outlying farmstead, was ordered to report at 5:30 a.m. to the company commander whose quarters were at the entrance into the village. By this time the men of the entire outer cordon had been posted without any particular incidents.

"The entire population headed by the elder was rounded up into a school house while one team immediately left for the outlying farmsteads situated some 7 kilometres away from the village, in order to bring in all the inhabitants... All the rest of the villagers were divided into 3 groups and shot down at the place of execution...

"The results of the operation are as follows:

289 people shot, 151 homesteads burnt down, 700 head of cattle driven away, as well as 400 pigs, 400 sheep and 70 horses..."³²

This is a report sent to the "higher-ups" by Captain Pels, commander of the 11th company of the 15th police regiment. Quite in the vein of a traditional military dispatch — cheerful and triumphant — from the battlefield. However, it is not without a "psychological touch", as you see,— apparently at the "top" this was expected from them, the doers.

With "a psychological touch", with emphasis on what was expedient and what was undesirable in conducting such operations, and pointing out the surprises ("special cases") encountered, the weak organizational links that were noticed.

The account sent in by Captain Kaspar, commander of the 9th company of the same 15th police regiment, which destroyed the village of Borisovka, emanates the same joy and pride of the executor who knows what the higher authorities expect from him:

"At daybreak the Borisovka elder gathered all the villagers. After a roll-call, with the help of the Divin security police, 5 families were moved into Divin. The rest were shot by a specially assigned squad and buried 500 metres north-east of Borisovka. A total of 169 people were shot, among them 49 men, 97 women and 23 children... All in all 12 homesteads and 8 barns were destroyed in the village itself, as well as 67 farmsteads outside the village... The sentences were carried out only at noon, by 1 o'clock, owing to necessary preparations (digging graves)." ³³

Captain Kaspar obligingly testified that the decision of the higher authorities concerning the massacre was quite farseeing for while the village was being burnt down "it was definitely established that explosion of munitions took place in some of the buildings".³⁴ The buildings were

burnt on September 26 by the 9th company after the Germans had plundered their victims' property. The fire was the finale of the barbarous mass murder, so the captain "established" the "guilt" of the executed and robbed peasants virtually on the fourth day after their death. He was answerable only for violation of the schedule and it was this violation that he was explaining away. In general Captain Kaspar's thoughts were mostly occupied with the economic results of the punitive expedition. He even made a suggestion as to how similar procedures might be improved and displayed a businesslike concern for property and "his people" — the looters:

"It is imperative that in the future we should demand that the district agent for agricultural affairs be present at such actions," Captain Kaspar suggests, "since we come across quite a number of matters that can only be cleared up personally." ³⁵

Captain Pels paid more attention than his colleagues did to the question of the "guilt" of the inhabitants of Zabolotye shot by his 11th company. He tried to find proof of their guilt not prior to the execution but while it was being carried out and, moreover, he even "found" it, about which he informed the higher authorities in his report. According to his notion, an innocent person who finds himself facing a submachine-gun muzzle should lose control of himself and if he retains his human dignity he must be guilty.

"The execution," Captain Pels reports, "was carried out according to plan and without any incidents worth mentioning, except for one attempt to escape. Most of the villagers retained their self-control and went to meet their fully deserved fate, which, because of their guilty conscience, they did not find unexpected." ³⁶

Nevertheless, these *Kaspars* and *Pels* knew full well that all the words about the victims' guilt were a mere formality, were just "in case". As

Hitler, the main butcher, used to say: the world does not necessarily have to know about "the ultimate goals" of nazi Germany, "it is important that we ourselves know them". And in the event that someone among the Germans would take seriously the reasoning that only guilty people were being punished, explanations and orders had been put out and distributed in the army, in which it was openly and categorically prohibited to punish a German soldier for *any* cruelty or unlawful acts against the population of occupied Soviet territories.

"No court proceedings are to be instituted against actions taken by Wehrmacht servicemen or civilian personnel in respect to the local population, even if these actions are war crimes or offences."³⁷

The commander of a battalion Major Golling in his summing up report describes the operation in the businesslike manner of a butcher; he draws the attention of his superiors to the complaint raised by executioner Oberstleutnant Müller (we shall cite his report below) concerning the inaccuracy of field maps on which certain isolated farmsteads had not been indicated, thus complicating the task; the Major supports Captain Kaspar's "innovation proposal" about improving the execution squads' business contacts with area and district agents for agricultural affairs, and then sums up the results of mass murders and looting:

"...Were shot: in Borisovka – 169 people, in Borki – 705 people, in Zabolotye – 289 people. Cattle, implements, grain, as well as carts and motor-vehicles were confiscated... 1,470 head of cattle, 1,108 pigs, 148 horses and 1,225 sheep were driven to Divin and Mokraný."³⁸

Here is another document: a day-book with reports on the "military feats" of the police regiment "Centre" that marched, or, rather, swam through the blood of the peaceful population first

across Poland and then Byelorussia. Each report on the execution of detained men, women, war prisoners and the Jewish population is followed by a sort of refrain, a stereotyped incantation – "in accordance with martial law". This "cue", addressed to those who, for the time being "do not have to know the ultimate goals" is a customary must, present even when the matter is clear to the entire world without it – in words pronounced by Hitler himself. In this day-book the extermination of the Jewish population is also explained by martial law, by their "guilt", since they are, allegedly, "engaged in communist propaganda" and "looting".

All this goes to the higher authorities and after a required summarization of experience the following "confidential orders" are sent down from the top... Note the special concern for "the mental equilibrium" of the murderer-executioners:

Police regiment "Centre"
1a 15 34

July 11, 1941

TOP SECRET!

1. In accordance with the order issued by the head of the SS and the police, e.g. the commander of the rear district of the "Centre" Army Group, all Jewish men from 17 to 45 who are detained for looting should be shot on the spot in accordance with martial law.

Executions should be carried out some distance away from towns, villages and communication routes.

Pits should be levelled out so that no mounds remain.

I forbid any pictures to be taken or spectators to be allowed to watch the executions. No public announcements shall be made of executions and graves shall not be marked or indicated.

2. Battalion and company commanders are to pay special attention to the mental equilibrium of the men participating in these actions. *The impressions of the day should be neutralized by*

the practice of friendly evening parties. (Author's italics.)

Later it is to be explained to people that these measures are conditioned by political necessity.

3. Reports about executions carried out are to be sent in during the day, not later than 8 p.m. and in a concise form.

Copies:

Police battal.	307	1	
— " — "	316	1	Montua
— " — " — "	322	1	Colonel of the
Dep. 11 a/c		4	security police,
			commanding officer
			Major of the security police ³⁹

And from a still higher level — from the nazi party apparatus and the army command — recommendations were sent out for general use. Here is how they sound, these recommendations, in an order given to the 293rd division (512th regiment):

"Preparations for destroying inhabited localities should be carried out so that: a) prior to the announcement the civilian population has not the slightest suspicion; b) destruction should begin at once, by a single blow, at a fixed day and hour: c) strict care must be taken that none of the civilians leave the populated points, especially after the announcement of their destruction is made."⁴⁰

* * *

In Khatyn there is a cemetery of more than 600 destroyed Byelorussian villages. And these are, by far, not all the villages to which the nazis came by foot or on wheels in order to annihilate and burn up everyone who lived there — from babies to old men, where the plan of "depopulating the territory" and "expanding Lebensraum to the East" was being put into effect.

The execution squads murdered people in 4,885 Byelorussian villages. *According to far from*

complete counts over three hundred thousand civilians were burnt alive, killed and tortured to death in these villages.

And approximately the same number of villages — 4,315 — "simply burnt down". Also at the hands of the nazis, but their inhabitants were not killed.

After one visits, as we have done, most of the districts and many of the villages, recording their wartime searing memory and then later reads reports drawn up by executioners, and reads documents, there emerges such a distinction as "simply burnt down". Because in the Khatyns the nazis also "worked" and more than that — "experimented".

The Byelorussian Khatyns were a preparation to realizing plans and attaining goals which concerned not only us, not only the Soviet people. And even not only Slavic peoples.

Here methods were being worked out and experts trained for "a final settlement" — the annihilation of entire peoples in Western and Eastern Europe and on other continents.

That, of course, was to happen after the destruction of nazi Germany's major enemies.

"When the war is won — then, as I have already told you, our work will start," Himmler ominously reminded his assistants in October 1943 at a meeting of SS gruppenführers in Poznan. "If the SS, together with the farmers and we together with our friend Backe (headed the police force. — *Authors.*) then organize the colony in the East on a grand scale without any restraint, without any question about any kind of tradition, but with nerve and revolutionary impetus, we shall in 20 years push the national boundary 500 kilometres eastward...

"...We shall impose our laws on the East. We will forge ahead, pushing our way forward little by little to the Urals."⁴¹

Such is the scope visualized for the future — for “when the war is won”. Even this, however, was meant only as the first step towards the world domination of the “Aryan race”.

The Eastern policy of genocide was already formulated by Hitler in 1932:

“The Eastern territories will become a huge experimental field for the establishment of a new social system in Europe and herein lies the great significance of our Eastern policy.”⁴²

Byelorussia was the first to be chosen as an “experimental field”. One of the reasons was that the nazis held that, economically, this land of forests and marshes was not the most “valuable”. Consequently, it was to be turned into a huge “enclosure” for “quarantining” entire peoples and subjecting them to “sonder Behandlung”...

Here are excerpts from a report sent in by one of the squads engaged in receiving trains, and “accommodating” and “settling” the Jewish population brought in from Western Europe. (According to Hitler’s plan, the Dutch, Belgian, British and other European peoples, whose lands were to be settled by German colonists, were to follow the same route, “resettling into Byelorussia” and “beyond the Urals”.)

SS group “Arlt”

Minsk, August 3, 1942

REPORT

The job of part of the men here is still the same. Transports with Jews arrive in Minsk over rather equal intervals and are turned over to us. So on 18 and 19.6.42 we were again busy digging pits...

26.6 — expected transport from the Reich arrived.

27.6 — we returned to Minsk. On the days that followed we were engaged in cleaning arms and putting into order our military uniforms.

2.7 — we again began to prepare for a new transport of Jews and started digging pits.

10.7 — a Latvian squad was sent out against the partisans in the forests near Koidanovo. A munitions depot was discovered during the operation. Suddenly we were fired at from the rear with submachine-guns. One of our Latvian colleagues was killed. We pursued the band and shot four people.

17.7 — transport of Jews arrived and was sent to the estate.

21, 22, 23.7 — dug new pits.

24.7 — another transport of Jews from the Reich (1,000 people).

25.7 to 27.7 — dug more pits.

28.7 — wide-scale action in the Minsk ghetto. 6,000 Jews brought to the pits.

29.7 — 3,000 German Jews brought to the pits.

The next few days we cleaned our arms and adjusted our military uniforms.

Later during the day my squad was on day-time duty guarding the prison building...

The men’s behaviour is quite normal, in non-duty hours it is quite good giving no cause for censure.

Unterscharführer SS⁴³

Trains continued to roll in from the East; occupied Byelorussia was more and more becoming a “sonder Behandlung” area for millions of people — people brought in from elsewhere as well as the local population. It was planned to subject no less than three-fourths of the Byelorussians to “sonder Behandlung”. At the same time the “technique of depopulation” would be mastered better and specialists trained. An essential point in these calculations was that, in the opinion of the himmlers and rosenbergs, “the Byelorussian is the most harmless and therefore the least dangerous nationality for us among all the peoples of the Eastern regions”.⁴⁴ The nazis were soon to realize to their horror that they had miscalculated in counting on the meekness of the Byelorussian people. They were harassed by hundreds of thousands of Byelorussian partisans, entire regions

were rendered inaccessible to the invaders, the Army Group "Centre" was almost constantly kept "on short rations", since the railway traffic was incessantly interrupted later, in 1943 and 1944, simultaneous partisan attacks – a thing unheard of in the history of wars – were launched on all railways – a "war on the rails"!

The nazis continued to massacre the population. Now they did it on the pretext of fighting the partisans, or even of "self-defence". The partisans were fighting back, hindering the expansion of the "work", and were so numerous that the Germans proved incapable of carrying out their "plan"; instead, they had to defend roads, towns and major objectives against partisan attacks. Special squads (under cover and with the participation of army units) continued their "work" with maniacal persistence, though the war was obviously already lost. They went on "improving" their methods, training "cadres", experimenting and preparing for something still more inhuman and outrageous.

And along the ominous path to this goal of a "final settlement in Europe" (and later in the entire world) – the tragedy of the Byelorussian villages: Borki, Krasnitsa, Britsalovich, Knyazhevodtsy, Studyonka, Parshchakha, Khatyn...

Several hundred Khatyns, reports and "experiments": "operation Borki (Maloritskiye)", "operation Borki (Kirovskiy)", "operation Krasnitsa", "operation Zbyshin"...

The expeditions as a whole were not usually designated by the name of a village or locality – they were mockingly dubbed Frühlingfest (Spring Festival), Sumpffieber (Swamp Fever), Sumpflüte (Swamp Flower), Nordpol (North Pole), Erntefest (Harvest Festival), Sternenlauf (Star Path), Schneehase (White Hare), Winterzauber (Winter Charms), Waldwinter (Forest Winter), Kugelblitz (Ball Lightning), Zauberflöte

(Magic Flute), Maigewitter (May Thunderstorm), Zigeunerbaron (Gipsy Baron), Freischütz (Free Marksman), and so forth.

The extermination of Krasnitsa, or Borki, or Britsalovich, however, just as the extermination of each of the Khatyns was generally a separate operation – with its specific goal, supplemented by a report on the behaviour of both the victims and the murderers themselves, describing blunders or "tactical finds" and "discoveries".

In one and the same locality the special squads would seldom annihilate two villages in the same way: in one place the people were assembled and driven to the threshing ground or into a shed for an alleged "meeting" or for "checking papers", while in a neighbouring village squads would go from house to house killing people on the spot. Utilizing their experience, enriching it...

Within the framework of the overall "goal" there was great freedom for sadistic improvisations. They would order people to pray (in Dory village, Volozhinskij District) and then burn them. Or else make their fun with people in this manner:

Julian Rudovich

"...Everybody was told to go to church and pray to God, and then we would be allowed to go home. In the church this German came up to me and said:

"Give the kinder to their mother and you – weg!"

"Took me by the collar and flung me out into the yard. Everyone without children – go out! And whoever consented to abandon a child, leave him in the church that is – could go out too. They let them out, let out those who abandoned... But not all mothers can do a thing like that. Well, mine didn't, didn't leave, didn't... I don't know...



"One of my daughters ran and he opened up with his machine-gun. She fell among the furrows. The German sent a boy... He, the boy, is still alive... 'Go and fetch the child I've just killed!' The boy ran up and started shaking her: 'Zhenya! Zhenya! ...' (The old woman cries.) 'I took her in my arms,' the boy said later, 'and brought her in.' The German began shouting and she opened her eyes. He lifted her dress and looked. 'A lucky child,' he said. 'I fired a machine-gun at her and she's still alive.'"

*From Darya Ivanovna Baran's
account. Baiki Village, Pruzhany
District, Brest Region.*

But someone's got to stay alive if this is the way it is, isn't it so? If that's the way it is, someone's got to stay alive! But mine didn't want to, she remained with the little one. The Germans set fire to the church and we, all of us in the churchyard, heard those in there flying about. Mowed down from machine-guns — nothing but flashes..."

Or else they would throw a feeble old woman into a well (Pogulyanka village, Rechitsa District) and hurl household things, cart wheels, logs on top of her...

And again they file "a report" — triumphant and solemn, imbued with an awareness of their "mission". No wonder, after all they are not just killers — they are serving an idea, the "great Germany" and their "Führer", they risk death at the hands of the partisans as they fight for the "new order".

Meanwhile headquarters officially encourage them, send down awards, certain executioners are set as an example to others.

Oskar Dirlewanger turned out to be most diligent and capable in such matters — Hitler rewarded him with high ranks and conferred on him every kind of "cross" in the Reich, from the "golden" to the Ritter Kreuz.

The "landmarks" of his biography are very typical: 1932 — becomes a member of the Nazi party; 1934 — gets a two-year term in jail for a criminal offence — "debauchery with persons under fourteen years of age". After gaining punitive experience in Spain and Poland he appears in Byelorussia with the following references: had a training which outweighs his previous conviction for "poaching". This is how the top ranking officers, Himmler included, with an understanding sneer termed the "fun" SS men indulged in "with persons under fourteen years of age"... The

order with which Dirlewanger arrived from Lublin to Byelorussia stated that he was to be treated as an "equal among us". The "equal" begins to rise at once making a career — this time on the blood of Byelorussian women and children. He is still inclined towards "poaching". The bearer of the golden, Ritter's and other crosses was fond of lecturing his lads: I have nothing against your sleeping with Russian wenches, all I require is that you kill her after you are through...

Over a hundred and twenty thousand people were killed or burnt alive by the "knights" of Dirlewanger's mercenary gang in Byelorussia. Borki, Kirovskiy, Zbyshin, Krasnitsa, Studyonka, Kopatsevichi, Puzichi, Makovye, Britsalovich, Velikaya Garozha, Gorodets, Dory, Ikany, Zaglinoye, Velikiye Prusy, Perekhody... In the Mogilyov and Minsk regions alone the Dirlewanger brigade burnt down a hundred and fifty localities together with their inhabitants. Also many other places, especially in the Vitebsk and Gomel regions. This butcher not only wrote reports but personally visited the capital of the "Third Reich", bringing back rewards and instructions for the enlargement of his brigade, and also the joyful conviction of a sadistic executioner that the chief killers know about him and rely on his zeal.

Praising Dirlewanger, his superiors wrote that he "sets an example of the joy of participation..." in the mass murder of people. "Joy" — and no less! This is what the men who planned the extermination of thirty million Slavs wanted and demanded from the actual killers. Thirty — as a starting point...

During the trial of the major war criminals in Nuremberg, a dialogue was recorded of tribunal and Bach-Zelewski, chief of Staff of the combat units for fighting partisans under the SS Reichsführer; he was an accomplice to these acts, one

well aware of the secret plans and goals of the nazi upper echelon.

I. V. Pokrovsky, Soviet prosecutor: Do you know anything about the existence of a special brigade consisting of smugglers, poachers and persons released from prison?

Von Dem Bach-Zelewski: An anti-partisan battalion under the command of Dirlwanger was formed and attached to Army Group Centre at the end of 1941 or the beginning of 1942... This 'Dirlwanger Brigade' consisted for the most part of previously convicted criminals; officially it consisted of so-called poachers, but it did include real criminals convicted of burglary, murder, etc.

I. V. Pokrovsky: How do you explain the fact that the German Army Command so willingly strengthened and increased its forces by adding criminals to them?...

Von Dem Bach-Zelewski: I am of the opinion that this step was closely connected with a speech made by Heinrich Himmler at Wewelsburg at the beginning of 1941, prior to the campaign against Russia, when he spoke of the purpose of the Russian campaign, which was, he said, to decimate the Slav population by 30 million, and that *it was in order to achieve this purpose that troops of such inferior caliber were introduced.* (Authors' italics.)

I. V. Pokrovsky: Can you actually and truthfully confirm that the measures taken by the Wehrmacht Command in the district administrative areas then occupied by the Germans were directed to the purpose of diminishing the Slavs and Jews by 30 million?

Von Dem Bach-Zelewski: I believe that these methods would definitely have resulted in the extermination of 30 million if they had been continued."⁴⁵

★ ★ ★

In the village of Borki, Maloritsky District, Brest Region, we recorded stories told by survivors about one of the atrocities perpetrated by such "knights of the new order". A report, an account of the same event by the executioner himself has also survived. He is Müller — Oberstleutnant of the 15th police security regiment. Both the victims and the executioner spoke about the same things — ordinary people and one from the pack of beasts who imagined that they were masters over the fate and the very lives of millions of people. Of people who, just imagine, do not live "the way they should" or "where they should" and of whom the planet has to be purged so that "führers" can reign: the "great" as well as the smaller and the very small — each of them a "führer" over somebody.

This hard-working little village once stood among the swamps, its people ploughing and sowing on the sandy soil, digging potatoes, mowing sedge on the swamps and placing beehives under the wild pear trees. And in the home of **Anna Mikhailovna Likhvan** (whose surname is now Khabovets) who could suspect that there was some sort of "plan" according to which all these villages were to be destroyed?

"...You see, three days before that a house-to-house count was made — how many people to a house, how big each family was," Maria Mikhailovna recalls. "The village elder wrote and the foreman wrote. Well, it was all taken down and three days later they did *this*..."

Even today, after thirty years, the woman is reluctant to use the words "killed", or "shot". Her human nature protests against these words and she uses the word "this" instead. And the word — the indefinite, conventional "this" — is psychologically more exact here: "this" is something that should not even have a name in human language!

Maria Likhvan had been invited to talk with us

in the library by a Borki teacher, but she took a long time in coming. We had already begun to worry as to whether she would comply with our request and agree to stir up her terrible memories. But finally she came, a neat woman dressed in her very best. Neatness seemed to be her second nature. She even spoke neatly, pronouncing each word very distinctly, intoning each phrase with a childish sincerity. Her Byelorussian sprinkled with Ukrainianisms sounded extremely smooth and in its own way — though this remark may be out of place here — beautiful and well-rounded.

“...In the evening me and my old man, we already knew it all. Went out into the yard. We were about a kilometre away from the village.

“My man says:

“‘Those are Germans.’

“But I says:

“‘Who knows.’

“‘What are we to do? Where can we run to with these little ones?... Let’s go into the house...’

“So we went into the house. We went into the house and stood there listening to that din, how people were rounded up in the night and the firing into people’s windows, that’s what we heard.

“So I rose before daybreak. Got up before daybreak and kindled the stove. We were digging spuds then. So I began kindling the stove. I had a baby boy just six weeks old, the rest were bigger.

“Then we heard this tramping, people a’running from the village, trying to get away, it seemed.

“‘Those are Germans!’

“And then we saw them — heading from all sides. Going there along the highway to Borisovka and their cars going too. All of them going and returning very soon.

“‘So,’ what he says, ‘where to, where to,’ he says.

“Now I said:

“‘These are already Germans.’

“There was a sort of thicket near us. So he said:

“‘I’ll go hide myself. They won’t bully a woman as badly.’

“He sat there for a little while and came back. I asks:

“‘What did you come back for?’

“He answers:

“‘No good that way... Whatever happens to one — let it happen to all of us. I can’t stay there.’

“Well, two of them walked into the house... No... One came in and those other two stood, circled round the place and looked — one went upstairs to the larder, looked around muttering something, perhaps asking whether there was anyone there. How would I know! Then says: ‘Los, los! To the meeting! To the meeting!’

“Then my man says:

“‘Get the children and yourself ready.’

“But I sat down and couldn’t move an inch. He says then:

“‘Take some bread along. You don’t know when they’ll let you go; the children might get hungry.’

“‘I’m not going to take anything along, I’m not going to take anything...’

“He took some bread himself. He put on his suit and I got ready too, and he got the children ready and took some bread along. When we went out — the sun was just rising as they were driving us out. We went out and the one who made us go out walked out of the house, and the two others were standing outside. And they waved to us to “stop”. So we stopped.

“‘Oh goodness, they’re going to shoot us, to shoot. We will be no more.’

“But my old man says:

“‘What will be will be... At least we’ll be together...’

"So we stood there a while. One of them went to the neighbour's again, went to see from the neighbour's place what it was shining in the village and waved for us to come towards him.

"We came up, came up.

"My oldest daughter, Ganna, was born in 1930. Upraska was born in 1933 and Garpyna in 1940 and the baby boy was only six weeks old. My man took the girl who was born in 1940, she was two years old already and I held the baby and so I walked along, though my feet wouldn't move. I fell behind and the German glanced first at him, then at me (the one who was driving us), at him, then at me again. The rest stood round. Then he asks:

"Is it a girl?"

"Yes, a girl."

"Kaputt, kaputt! Nice-looking girl kaputt..."

"Oh, come on, miserable fate," I say, "We're going to be killed!"

"Carts now went past us, they all got into carts.

"It's not just you," he says, "everybody's been driven out."

"We came here, to the vegetable patch, and oh! how many people were there already! How many people! We came and they made us sit down. So he holds that girl born in 1940 and I — the baby boy. Then this German says:

"All men from eighteen to forty come out."

"From eighteen to forty..."

"My husband was holding this daughter of ours, so he put her down, kissed her, and walked out. And the German took a pole — he'd lined so many up, there were three rows of men, older ones and young ones — so he took that pole and like this, with the pole, it was the kind of pole we use for lifting haystacks, he levelled them all out while we stood there weeping, weeping. The children cried too. There was not a dry thread in our kerchiefs..."

"And he drove them and drove them to that highway. Those men, I mean. And these Germans that were driving them on, they pulled little flasks out of their pockets, gulp, gulp, then sort of wrapping themselves in their raincoats.

"So they drove the men away..."

"And our elder, he got into that car and drove away, somewhere to the other end and when he got out, he started running from house to house, collecting those shovels. People didn't know yet what was going to happen, they thought perhaps a raid on the partisans was to be made, or something. Didn't know anything... But when he collected those all shovels, folks began to say: 'He's bringing us bad luck with his shovels.' And he drove away over there, turned and rode away to the cemetery, the elder did.

"Then they drove in this first batch and came back for more, lined up those men again... I forgot now — was it three or four times they took away those men, from eighteen to forty years old. They rounded them up and made them dig a pit there. So they had to dig those pits. As they dug we could already hear the shots: pock-pock-pock!... Right here, not very far..."

Even such a hair-raising human tragedy may be, it appears, described with joy and enthusiasm. Oberstleutnant Müller, performing the duties of commander of the tenth company, wrote in his report:

"...The operation proceeded according to plan except for time shifts in some of its stages. The main reason was as follows. Borki is shown on the map as a compact village. In reality it turned out to be a settlement extending 6 or 7 kilometres in length and breadth.

"When I discovered this at dawn I expanded the cordon from the eastern side and organized the outflanking of the village in the form of pincers while simultaneously enlarging the distance

between sentries. As a result I managed to capture and bring to the assembly point all the villagers without exception. It was fortunate that the aim for which the population was being rounded up was unknown to it until the last moment. Peace and quiet reigned at the assembly place, the number of sentries was reduced to a minimum and the forces thus released could be used in the next stages of the operation. The team of grave-diggers was given shovels only at the place of execution owing to which the population was unaware of what was going to happen. Inconspicuously positioned light machine-guns immediately suppressed the panic that had just started when the first shots were heard from the place of execution situated at a distance of some 700 metres from the village. Two men attempted to escape but were mowed down by machine-gun fire after making only a few steps. The execution began at 9 a.m. and ended at 6 p.m. It was conducted without any complications, preparatory measures proved to be extremely expedient.”⁴⁶

Three other women besides Maria Likhvan survived in Borki Maloritskiye. The execution squad drove them from the village to the cemetery where the people were being killed. Fifty metres separated them from the common grave pits... These women recall the events and add new details.

Maria Kondratovna Khamuk, at that time the childless wife of a soldier. Her husband was taken prisoner by the Germans in September, 1939, when he was in the Polish army; at the time the invaders exterminated Borki he was in Germany.

“...Thirteen souls there were in our family. We’d all gone to bed when somebody knocked at the door. My mother-in-law got up and said:

“‘Get up, children, that’s our death coming...’

“But how she could know nobody knows.

“Ten of them took us. My father-in-law took some bread, but the German snatched that bread out of his hand and threw it away; we could now see something was bound to happen...

“They drove us into the village to the meeting and made us sit down in a kitchen-garden; we sat there until the Germans come along and call out everyone between eighteen and forty-five. Called them out and placed them, four in a row, saying: ‘Going to take you to Germany...’ Then we saw a truck driving by and taking, collecting shovels; they are carrying them out of houses. Folks said now they were going to kill people, shoot them – everyone who was a deputy, who was this or that... Who could’ve imagined they were going to kill everybody? Nobody imagined that...

“So we wait and wait and say: ‘Soon they’ll come!’

“We, all of us, are sitting in this kitchen-garden, there are lots of us. Waiting – at last an end came to our waiting.

“So it began! The Germans were already here; those who couldn’t walk – they took in carts, but those who could they drove on foot to the cemetery, thirty people in a group.

“Then my turn comes but I still stay behind, stay behind. Very few people left. We already think: ‘Come what may, let’s go ahead.’ We can’t stand it any longer, our nerves are at breaking point. So we set off. There were about thirty of us, forced ahead to the cemetery. He brought us there – taken-off clothes in piles. So we thought – it was raining so hard, so hard and so we thought these were the murdered people lying in such a heap. We came up to the place and saw it was clothes; the people were all naked, they drove the people to the pit to be killed naked.

"Then they made us lie face down by this pile of clothes. And one again says in Polish: "Get up, those who have passports – give them to us!"

"Under the Germans we used to have our fingerprints on our passports.

"We, some of us, handed over their passports and some didn't, some had left them behind. Who could've remembered it at such a time...

"Then they say in Polish:

"Take off your clothes."

"I begged them at least to let me die in my clothes.

"What d'you need your pearls for?' they say. Take everything off!"

"Here, right here I wore beads, two strings of them. I had beads of pearls.

"Then I began to beg them again. I thought: I've got no kin here in Borki – only in-laws – but my other kinfolk, my mother and father, they lived in another village, in Borisovka. It, too, was all killed... How I begged them! I said my man was in Germany.

"But he says:

"D'you have letters?"

"I says: 'I do, at home.'

"I think: what if he leads me home and I don't find those letters... And there really were none of those letters, I was just trying to trick him so's to stay alive.

"Then he says in Polish:

"Take your things!"

"I began to move away, naked, with only my undershirt on, I had no dress on me. Then he says in Polish:

"Take your things. Only,' he says, 'don't take what isn't yours.'

"They made me sit down in the tall weeds, under a pine tree. It began to rain still harder...

"And the folk they had driven in with me, and

the little children, too, they killed before my very eyes... Mothers undiapered their babies and he carried them, naked, to the pit..."

Evkhima Parfenovna Balantsevich was also at that time a soldier's wife. As Maria Khamuk's husband, hers, too, had been prisoner during the Polish-German war. The young woman had a six-year-old son to support and she had her old mother, one of those mothers whom folk songs call a sage in the house. Evkhima Parfenovna says:

"When they were herding us to the school house all the people said perhaps we'll just be taken to Germany, but when we passed beyond the school folks began to say: 'This is the end of us. They'll kill us...'

"One man, Kalchuk by name, when he saw a motorcar with Germans in it, he jumped out of a window and began running towards the shrubs. He reached the shrubs and there he was killed. The Germans started shooting at him from the car. They returned in that car to the kitchen-garden and said:

"Our car was fired on and you keep saying there're no partisans here. And our car was fired on."

"Who could do the firing?"

"We were all in the garden..."

"Then his own mother comes and says to her daughter:

"Dear child, our Ivan is no longer alive."

"Then we all began to weep. If Ivan is no more, we are all no more!

"They killed him near the ditch."

QUESTION: "And did he really fire on the car?"

"Nobody fired, they just said it so we wouldn't scatter all over the vegetable plot, said 'our car has been fired on'."

QUESTION: "Did you have any partisans here?"

"No. We saw none here. We never seen partisans here, never. From our village only one man, Radiyuk Vladimir, was with the partisans, when they were killing.

"...Oh, he rounded up those young lads... Then cars drove along the village collecting shovels. Took those shovels and gave them to those lads to dig pits. They dug trenches, I didn't see how. We heard the machine-gun fire away, heard the sound of it, the shooting. Cut them down from machine-guns...

"Well, so we sat there waiting for our turn: nowhere to run to now.

"He killed them all and came for the older lads and the men. Took out the men, led away some and drove away others — one way or another.

"Killed all of them and then began picking out the women. They took me there too, on a cart. Some couldn't walk, others walked and still others sat. I don't remember now how many of us sat on that cart... My little son was with me. And my mother — when we drove up to the cemetery we thought those were killed people there, but it was clothing lying around.

"Got us there — and the clothes... Made us take off our things, going to kill us. We began to undress... And then my mother, she says to me: 'Beg them, child.'

"My man, you see, was in Germany. So I says:

"'Sir, don't kill me, my husband is in Germany, a war prisoner. In Germany, I say, and here I have a little son, too...'

"He says at once:

"'You got any letters from him?'

"I says: 'No.'

"'Got a passport?'

"'Yes.'

"I had the passport right in my pocket, took it

along... He, the one who made us undress, says:

"'Stand there, in the back.'

"I stood there. My married sister went ahead already and my younger sister too, and then my mother, and another sister, a fourteen-year-old, and my sister-in-law with her two sons — one was four and other two... They walked away from me and I stood there thinking: 'How shall I go to such a death...' I was left alone. I stood there all alone. I kept standing. He drives them away and makes them undress. I stand there watching them undress. They take off their things and go over there. There, right there, beyond the cemetery. He made them undress on this side of the cemetery and shot them on the other side and I couldn't see those pits from where I was standing.

"Later that German says to me:

"'Come, sit down on these stakes.'

"That cemetery was fenced with such stakes.

"I went and sat down taking my son along, right opposite that mound of clothing. I saw how some folk were hurried up, others undressed, still others driven farther away — ready to be killed, some brought in on carts, some led in — that's how it was! I watched how these people were distributed...

"Hatless, in shirts, their sleeves rolled up. And captures those people and already leads them away to the pit to be shot... The Germans wore factory-made shirts and no hats — oh! Had revolvers. I saw them myself. And they drank vodka, you know, drank vodka! They would take out a quarter bottle, swirl it around, and down the drink in a gulp... Did it to brace 'em up, I guess.

"So I sat there and sat... And then those four pot-bellied Germans, with their fat mugs, shoulder-straps and visored caps... Stood right over me and, you know, ger-gerred among themselves, ger-gerred and went away. Away... Said nothing...

"Two of my man's brothers were killed, and his

father, too. And my own folks, too, you know: two of my brothers, my ma and pa, two children of one of the brothers, and the others' two, and my married sister, and my kid sister... Let me count how many... You know, I've forgotten how many in all... Two brothers... Fifteen of my own kin, and of my man's kin two brothers and his father, but his ma and granny survived... So did I, and my boy..."

As they faced the tommy-gun muzzles, these peaceful people sought for some way out. Some would try to convince the Germans that their relatives — who were actually taken prisoner when they served in the Polish Army — were working in Germany. Sometimes this ruse worked. The men of the execution squad, driven blood-crazy by the massacres, would suddenly let someone go. Perhaps they did this in order to demonstrate to others and convince themselves that they, too, were "führers" and "gods".

By the way, Evkhima Parfenovna's husband, upon learning about the terrible fate that befell his family and native village risked an escape from captivity; having succeeded, he helped the partisans and later enlisted in the Soviet Army and died the death of a hero fighting the nazis.

Agapa Sergiyevich was at that time just under forty, the mother of three children. Among all the survivors she is probably most characteristically representative of the type of peasant woman evolved over the centuries in the remote Polesye villages. The guileless nature of these people is, as they say, written on their faces and is perceptible in their voices, in every word they utter.

Agapa Sergiyevich says:

"...I was at home then. In comes my old man — we had a horse — so he comes in and says:

"‘The Germans are taking away the horses.’

"So I says:

"‘Take our horse and skip! If it were just the horses...’

"He got on that horse and hied himself away to Kupcheye, in the Ukraine. It wasn't far, right beyond the marsh. Well, I stayed at home, had a little daughter, just two years old then. So they come along to my place, the overseer with them, too, and he says:

"‘Come over to the meeting.’

"Now I'd never been to any of those meetings. I couldn't go and don't like to go to such affairs. But they wouldn't leave me alone. So I see all the folks are going. The whole village. I got there, too. Our forest was that way — over there. My neighbour was there, too, so I said to him:

"‘D'you know what it means that they're making folks go to this meeting? Maybe they're going to kill us?’

"But he says:

"‘What's got into your head? What would they kill you for?’

"So be it...

"Folks trudging through the village, marched on and on, and then they herded them into the elder's vegetable garden. I looked around: all the villagers were standing there on their knees. All on their knees! So I says:

"‘What now? Didn't I tell you? Just what I said...’

"Well, they marched us past the vegetable garden. And drove us to the cemetery in parties. In parties. I was carrying my daughter in my arms, and so I walked into the cemetery. Already every group is huddling with their relatives and already they're hugging each other, and already the machine-guns are there and going rat-tat-tat... I already begin undressing."

QUESTION: "Did they order you to get undressed?"

'Of course they did. There was such a great pile of clothing... I don't even know what happened to it. And also such a great heap of bottles: they would just drink and shoot, drink and shoot!...

"Well, I think to myself, this is the end. Nothing left. Only my boy left, the one who was grazing the cattle, and the other, a smaller one, too. So I think: 'They'll die of hunger, of hunger.' There was this German, I don't know... Perhaps he was Russian... So I began pleading with him:

"'Oh,' I says, 'master dear, let me go. I have two boys left at home, let me go...'

"'And where is your old man?'

"I says:

"'Building bridges.'

"People were building bridges then. But he wasn't at the bridges. Just led away the horse.

"Then he says:

"'We can let you go, of course, but will you come back?'

"'I'll come.'

"He sent a patrol along with me, so I went to the village, came to the village and said:

"'There's this lad of mine left alone, he'll die of hunger, I'll go get him, better to let them kill him.'

"Then they made me go back to the cemetery, and the one who'd let me go comes running from the cemetery. So he says:

"'What, are you bringing your husband along?'

"I says:

"'No, he's far away, at the bridges.'

"So I went back to the village and hung around there for a long time. Meantime they'd begun finishing off the people. But I got away.

"That's all..."

Oberstleutnant Müller, the acting commander of a company of murderers, described the results of these events in the manner of a book-keeper's account:

"I here cite the execution figures," he wrote in his report. "705 persons were shot, 203 of them men, 372 women and 130 – children.

"...Expended during the operation in Borki: rifle cartridges – 786, cartridges for submachine-guns – 2,496.

"The company sustained no losses. One wachmeister was sent to a hospital in Brest on suspicion of jaundice."⁴⁷

True, something unexpected did happen, something that should have upset the equilibrium of even such an ober-killer as Müller.

His bestial pack was joined by a new man... Perhaps he was not so very much of a human being if he turned up among them, but however that may be – the inhuman "job" was too much for him...

Here is the continuation of the story of **Maria Likhvan** whom we left together with her children in that terrible vegetable garden belonging to the village elder, among old men, women and children, guarded by members of the execution squad. Here is what she says:

"...So one of them comes out, maybe he was an interpreter. And he says:

"'Is Maria Likhvan here?'

"My neighbour says: 'Master, I'm Maria Likhvan.' She says: 'I'm Maria Likhvan.' But I was thinking to myself: 'He's calling me out – to kill me...'

"So I come forward and two of my daughters with me, while the one born in 1940 was in my mother-in-law's arms, and my baby boy was with me too. So off we go, all of us. As we walk along

he takes my mother-in-law by the shoulders like this and pushes her back. But I say:

"Master, they are my mum and daughter!"

"Ye, ye."

"The ones who came running in the Germans immediately struck with the butts of their rifles and forced back.

"Well, we went out, went out and I think: 'Lord above, what next?'"

"By this time the folk from that village on the left side came in and my husband's sister with them and her father-in-law. My man's sister's son was in German-Land, a prisoner of war there."

QUESTION: "Was he taken from the Polish Army?"

"Aye.

"And they began to plead ... saying they were so and so. They put it all down on paper and then called us out and we went.

"Then I says:

"What now that I've come out? Came out with the children, such children. Well, what am I alone?... I need my man,' I said. 'Otherwise let me be killed.'

"But the father-in-law of my husband's sister says:

"Wait, we'll ask them to call out your husband.'

"We went to speak to the Germans. Says:

"With what group was he taken?"

"The first."

"Oh, he must already be working far away."

"But he was already killed by that time. My man. That's how it was.

"So they took us and led us away. I had a first cousin there, he was also shot then... They led us to that house. Let me in and those four children. I wept bitterly in that house. But my father-in-law stayed behind. Those who stayed behind they didn't let in. And he says:

"Don't cry, don't cry, your Ignat is alive, he escaped. We saw him run away."

"What do you mean he ran away?" I says, 'when I know for sure he didn't run away?'"

"So we sat inside there. And there were Germans and Germans. Came into the house, came in and asked:

"What makes her cry like that?"

"Took that girlie of mine, the one born in 'forty, pressed her to his heart and gave her a sweet. And is weeping, weeping, weeping.

"There was one of our villagers from Borki who knew a little German. So he says:

"There's this woman here, left with her children, small as beans, one can't lift up another and her husband is killed."

"This German goes on weeping. He sits there a while and again walks out into the yard. But whenever the shooting begins out there, he returns to the house. Maybe he wasn't a German at all? Or don't understand what it all was?..."

QUESTION: "Did he carry a gun?"

"No, he had no gun on him."

QUESTION: "And did he wear a German uniform?"

"A German one, German.

"So we sit in there, sit for a long time. The sun is already setting..."

"...We drove the cattle, our cows, to Mokransy, it was so, how shall I put it – when blood was still flowing and the dead not buried yet..."

This simple woman, despite her mortal fear and personal grief, noticed at the time and remembered forever one human manifestation among bestialized murderers. **Evkhima Balantsevich** also remembers the German who broke into tears.

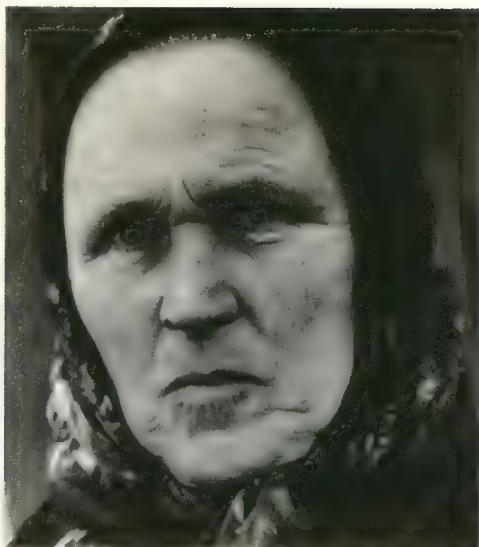
"...One German entered the house and began wringing his hands. I saw it myself. He would



**"... And such a great heap of bottles:
they would just drink and shoot,
drink and shoot! ..."**



Maria Khamuk



Yevkhima Balantsevich

Maria Likhvan



take a look at those people, shake his head, turn away and wipe his eyes with a handkerchief. Everybody saw this, the ones who were killed later, too. They said: 'See how he cries...' He couldn't stand it, went out into the elder's porch and fell down, just fell. And when they saw him, they at once took him away."

QUESTION: "On a cart?"

"No, in a motorcar..."

Oberstleutnant Müller lied in his report – it turns out that it was not suspicion of jaundice that caused one of his subordinates to be taken to Brest. However, there was scarcely any risk in such a lie. His main boss, Himmler, insisted on terming any manifestation of humanity as weakness, i.e. – indisposition. On October 4, 1943, speaking at a Poznan meeting of the SS Obergruppenführers of the occupied Eastern territories, Himmler boasted and praised his subordinates for curing themselves of their conscience as of a human weakness. Himmler spoke precisely of these gollings, müllers, kaspars and pels:

"Most of you must know what it means when 100 corpses are lying side by side, or 500, or 1,000. To have stuck it out and at the same time – apart from exceptions caused by human weakness – to have remained decent fellows, that is what makes us hard."⁴⁸

* * *

The republic "of the most harmless of Slavs", as was first assumed by the "planners" of people's fates in fascist Berlin, proved itself to be a land of a mass partisan movement. The almost half a million-strong army of people's avengers in Byelorussia together with the partisans of other republics created a real "second front" in the German

rear. The nazis had not enough strength left to cope with the people's fury, with the flames of a nation-wide war, and the further things progressed, the less strength the German had. Instead they accumulated more and more hatred and fierceness. Hatred for all those who proved to be stronger than it was "planned" by the nazi Reich, for those who did not wish to "resettle", or "move out", or become obedient slaves of the invaders. Their hatred also killed people – the most peaceful and defenceless ones. The extermination of the population in towns and villages continued as did the turning of entire districts into desert zones – especially in Vitebsk Region, in the northern part of Minsk Region... The nazi theoreticians of "depopulation" became slaves of the "plan" they had themselves invented. However, political insanity, too, does not appear out of nowhere; a certain soil is needed for its growth.

Back in the 1920s a hysterical agitator from Bavarian beer houses, a lance-corporal in the First World War Adolf Hitler began to cull and train cadres of political adventurers, pogrom-makers and ravishers. He sniffed out the vindictive spirit of revenge among the German burghers, and among the military caste – its arrogant bellicosity. In the industrialists and financial tycoons, frightened as they were by the spectre of a "red revolution", he saw the economic power that was ready to support him and that would finance the preparation for an aggression. To combine all these forces within the clenched fist of nazi dictatorship and hurl them to the East to win "Lebensraum" – in this insolent and coarse manner did the political adventurer formulate his programme, "substantiating" it by the bestial principles of the struggle for existence and natural selection: "In struggle I see the purpose of every Creature's existence."⁴⁹ "Strength is the primary right."⁵⁰ "The capitalists have worked their way to the top

through their capacity, and on the basis of this selection, which again only proves their higher race: they have a right to lead."⁵¹

Hitler did not nurture his plans on hysterical clamour alone. His doctrines were supported by political terror; he knocked together militarized SA and SS detachments, set them the task of first seizing a street, and then from the streets and squares he wormed his way to power.

Individuals selected for the party apparatus were raised to the skies by Hitler; he placed them above other people and called them "the knightly order of leaders". A claimant to the post of a führer had only to shed his human conscience, recognize brutal force as the law of life, learn to obey blindly orders issued by those who were stronger, never to doubt or criticize, and he would be accepted into the caste of leaders and be assigned to the post of micro-führer in an area of the occupied territories.

At first, when Hitler had only just launched his political adventure, he valued above all in his accomplices their lack of scruple and insolence, and advised them to adopt as their motto the words: "if you are not a German I shall smash your skull". But already in the 1930s when he was ready for his decisive step – the seizure of power – he put his subordinates on a chain and demanded blind obedience: "...Every Party member has to do what the leader orders. The leader incorporates the Idea and alone knows its ultimate goal."⁵²

And now the "system" which the rich brought to life and financed, which they helped to gain strength, acquired a certain degree of independence, turning its masters, too, into its slaves, into small screws of a dreadful totalitarian machine: having done away with the communists, social-democrats and representatives of the scientific and creative intelligentsia, who were exterminated or put behind barbed wires, the nazi machine with

the same ruthlessness began to crush the bones of anyone who wanted to retain his personal independence and freedom.

The vigorous drive for setting up the nazi cult of strength proceeded according to plan. Power was their ideal, a special form of property, a special value. The gaining of power, the distribution of power and its exercise were regulated by special rituals.

The ritual of domination included mass spectacles, rallies, pogroms and orgies during which Hitler and his clique publicly glutted themselves with power, infecting a man-in-the-street with a power mania, turning petty burghers into aggressive adventurers. As the experience of domination malignantly expanded, the nazi clique sent out a call for plunder on a world-wide scale: the *Anschluss* in Austria, occupation of Czechoslovakia, Poland, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Holland, France and other countries. All these were new strata and new sessions of power. Meanwhile the German bourgeois and burgher were being prepared for the major act – aggression against the Soviet Union.

The one-time shoe- and sausage-makers, brewers, shopkeepers, and clerks – the standard bourgeois small fry, the rural and urban *lumpen* who had been brainwashed by nazi propaganda were blinded and deafened by the glitter and brandishing of the attributes of absolute power given to them by the Führer's "comrades-in-arms" as they sent them to establish "a new order" on the occupied Soviet territories. The eyes of these micro-führers became paper wall-eyes which had nothing but the words of orders and directives. These puppets grew paper ears which filtered through nothing but the Führer's orders. The Führer called this upside-down world the beginning of a new world, "a new order" in Europe. Conditioned by the poison of nazism, the

- 1.) Chef Bandenkampf-Verbände
- 2.) Höheren H- und Polizeiführer Ukraine
- 3.) Höheren H- und Polizeiführer Rußland-Mitte.

1. Der Führer hat entschieden, daß die bandenverseuchten Gebiete der Nordukraine und von Rußland-Mitte von jeder Bevölkerung zu räumen sind.

2. Die gesamte arbeitsfähige männliche Bevölkerung wird gemäß noch der abzumachenden Bestimmungen des Reichskommissar für den Arbeitseinsatz zugewiesen, jedoch unter den Bedingungen von Kriegsgefangenen.

3. Die weibliche Bevölkerung wird dem Reichskommissar für den Arbeitseinsatz zur Arbeit im Reich zugewiesen.

4. Ein Teil der weiblichen Bevölkerung und alle elternlosen Kinder kommen in unsere Auffanglager.

5. Die bevölkerungsauffig evakuierten Gebiete sind tunlichst noch noch zu treffender Abmachung mit dem Reichs-ernährungsminister und dem Minister für die besetzten Ostgebiete von den Höheren H- und Polizeiführern in Bewirtschaftung zu nehmen und dort zum Teil mit Kok-Sgys zu bebauen und soweit es möglich ist, landwirtschaftlich auszunutzen. Die Kinderlager sind an den Rand dieser Gebiete zu legen, sodaß die Kinder als Arbeitskräfte für den K-Sgys-Abbau und für die Landwirtschaft zur Verfügung stehen.

Die endgültigen Vorkehrungen sind mir baldigst mitzuteilen.

1. Übergruppenführer B e r g e r
2. Untergruppenführer B a c k e.

gez. H. H i m m l e r .

burgher in the rank of micro-führer blindly believed in all this and continued to destroy the foundations of civilization, sowing violence, senseless cruelty, terror and death.

And even though after Stalingrad and especially after the battle of Kursk Hitler's war machine was already hopelessly rolling back to the German borders, the "plan" still hung over the heads of not merely these minor führers, but also over those of the greatest ones. How "surprised" they were that things did not develop according to their plans can be seen from the testimony and admissions of the nazi generals who wrote their memoirs (Guderian, Tippleskirch and others).

Here is what Walter von Schellenberg, one of the heads of Hitler's secret service, wrote in his book of reminiscences *Le chef du contre-espionnage nazi parle (1933-1945)* published in 1957 in Paris:

"If the information received did not correspond to their own conceptions they merely threw it aside. As for the highest leadership, things here were still worse. For instance, up to the end of 1944 Hitler ignored all the unfavourable information he received, even if it was based on real acts or merely on common sense."⁵³

For example, Hitler almost to the very end would not believe that there really existed a mighty Soviet Army that was driving the Germans westward. How come, when he had destroyed it back in the summer of 1941 and even announced this to the entire world? And since he had announced it — it was true. Dictators of this sort believe in their own words as in something final and incontrovertible. Oh, no, it is all the fault of the generals, their mediocrity and treason are to blame, for how, indeed, could "these Russians" drive "his" soldiers, "his" army, all the more so since the Soviet Army factually no longer exists!

This maniac's "logic" became state thinking in the nazi empire, so why wonder that Hitler's asso-

ciates reasoned and acted accordingly. For instance, where the partisans were concerned, or the general situation on the occupied territories.

In the summer of 1943 Himmler forwarded to the heads of the punitive troops and the higher officers of the SS and the police of the Ukraine and of "middle Russia" Hitler's order that "the areas of northern Ukraine and middle Russia should be entirely cleared of the population". This meant the Byelorussian Polesye region, too, which the Germans had included into the "Reichskommissariat of the Ukraine".

The Germans practically no longer had any "middle Russia" while the Polesye first had to be won back from the partisans before they could start carrying out this next barbarous order; however, the order was written and the führers expected its precise execution by some forces. After all, they had had the necessary forces for this just recently and the maniacal murderers could not believe that this was no longer true!

In another ten days the enraged Himmler will repeat his order — because something has definitely gone wrong in the "machine", its links no longer function properly, neither do the "human screw". And again the former agronomist Himmler expounds his own (and his Führer's) ideas about fighting partisans ... with the aid of kok-saghyz. But before all came the plans of vengeance to the local population who expected to outlive both the "plans" of hitlerite Berlin and the authors of these cannibalistic orders and calculations.

Reichsführer SS Operations administration, July 20, 1943
No 39 (168) 43

TOP SECRET

1. To the head of the security police and the SD.
2. To the head of the punitive troops fighting the bands.

3. To the highest SS and police officer of middle Russia (Russland-Mitte).

4. To the highest SS and police officer of Southern Russia (Russland-Süd).

5. To the head of the chief managerial and administrative department of the SS.

Some time ago I issued an order to the effect that camps should be set up in the East, in which we will train the children of the evacuated bandit population, turning them into people we can use for labour, who will in the future become good labour for the German people. As it seems to me, the solution of this problem is not proceeding too well. At the same time I have received a suggestion from the head of the security police and the SD of 10.7.1943 that the wives of the bandits and their offspring be kept isolated in a special camp at Travniki. To my mind this suggestion offers no solution to the problem.

I ask the corresponding heads of the central administrations and the Obergruppenführers of the SS to jointly discuss and carry out the following instruction issued by me.

The Führer has ordered the *bandit territories* of northern Ukraine and middle Russia to be finally and completely cleared of their population. This must be done within the next four months. In the future these territories will be utterly inaccessible for settlement by the bandits, since they will find nothing there for survival – neither shelter nor food. On the other hand, I think these territories should not lie fallow – in the sense of fur supply and the utilization of the soil. I visualize two possibilities:

1. By means of forces sufficient to maintain security we occupy one or another territory for a period of several weeks. Together with us there arrive forestry administration personnel, and with them lumber workers. In the course of these weeks trees are felled in the protected forests and, which is perhaps still better, the timber is carted away by small Russian horses either to the railway or, if it is summer, to the waterways down which it will be floated.

2. On lands that are found to be arable we shall begin to grow kok-saghyz or other useful plants, which, however, cannot be used as food for people. I have in mind, for instance, hemp (not flax) and other oil-bearing crops, or the planting of

willows for weaving baskets to hold ammunition. Perhaps some other plants of this type can be found. However, above all, if available fertile land can be found, I have in mind kok-saghyz. In such cases the same methods may be applied as in the utilization of forests for timber.

If such plants were cultivated I would fear no damage at the hands of the bandits, because even a large number of people finding themselves on a territory devoid of food, could destroy the plantations only by means of poisoning the plants, ploughing them over, or trampling them. And this is generally a very difficult undertaking and it could easily be discovered and stopped by means of aviation control.

On days when we need more manpower to till the soil or reap the harvest we shall occupy territory and bring in women and children to do the required agricultural work.

For this reason I consider it expedient that the wives of the bandits and all the children rounded up be settled on the outskirts of the bandit territories where they are to occupy themselves with useful work, such as weaving baskets and so forth. They should, however, be given a food ration sufficient only for a few days and they are not to receive any sizable plots of land exceeding what is necessary to feed them and their children. At harvest-time the entire yield should be carefully stored by us in safe places, to ensure that the bands have absolutely no chance to feed on stolen or plundered produce. On the other hand, a sufficient daily amount of food for the workers should be issued in daily rations solely in accordance with the Russian piecework and Stakhanovite system.

I expect that Gruppenführer of the SS Globochnik will conduct this work as a matter of first priority in middle Russia.

H. Himmler

Obersturmbahnführer of the SS⁵⁴

What previously and quite recently appeared so ominous, now ever-increasingly turns into the bustle of infuriated and frightened rats whose day of reckoning is near. The nazi executioners have less and less opportunities to wreak their vengeance on the population of occupied territories. And all the more so – to think of the “final settlement”.

And yet they proceed with the realization of their initial "Ost" plan. Strategic and tactical military plans collapse, as do hopes for victory, for world domination in the near future, for the thousand-year "Third Reich", but they do their utmost to kill ... well, at least one more child – Russian, Byelorussian, Ukrainian or Polish...

What was this – the automatic action of some terrible thoughtless mechanism?

No, not this alone.

In certain headquarters and in certain heads all this had quite a "rational" meaning and served an even more global plan.

Pan-Germanism was its name. Hitlerism and nazism may be regarded as an especially sinister stage in the development and aspirations of the Pan-Germanism of long standing that always preached the following: even when losing a war the greatest possible damage should be inflicted on contiguous countries and peoples. Especially on their "biological potential". So that "next time" there should be fewer of them and more of the Germans...

In 1906, in his book *War*, one of the Pan-German politicians, Klaus Wagner, wrote:

"Let us bravely organize great forced migrations of the inferior peoples of Europe. Posterity will be grateful to us. Coercion will be necessary. They must be driven into reserves where we shall keep them segregated so that we may obtain the space necessary for our expansion."⁵⁵

The voice, the intonation and the wording are quite in the Rosenberg style...

Or this from a speech by another Pan-Germanist, Heinrich Class, who in 1913 preached:

"We must close our hearts to compassion...

"...Little countries like Holland and Belgium have lost their right to exist...

"We must pursue an aggressive policy... France must be crushed once and for all. ...Let it (war –

Auth.) be welcome, as the physician of our soul...

"We await the Führer! Patience, patience, he will come..."⁵⁶

And in 1943 – already on behalf of the patiently awaited Führer – Marshal von Rundstedt addressed the Reich Military Academy in Berlin:

"The destruction of neighbouring peoples and their riches is indispensable to our victory. One of the great mistakes of 1918 was to spare the civil life of the enemy countries, for it is necessary for the Germans to be always at least double the number of the peoples of the contiguous countries. We are therefore obliged to destroy at least a third of their inhabitants..."⁵⁷

For this reason, even having factually lost the war, they continued to kill – women and children... At least one more Russian, Byelorussian, Ukrainian or Polish child... And the automatism of this is the hair-raising automatism of the nazi extermination machine. In each individual case. While on the whole there was again a plan, again reckoning on the distant future.

And when the power of their brutality, of their madness was narrowed down to their own German territory that very "plan" turned against German population itself. They could not refrain from killing, hanging, drowning and burning – this is the form of their existence. This murderous nature of theirs revealed itself in their readiness, in their desire and striving to turn even Germany into a "desert zone". Now this was the only land which remained for such "work".

And this is how the "Führer of the German nation" showed his gratefulness to Germany:

"If the war is to be lost, the nation also will perish. This fate is inevitable. There is no need to consider the basis even of a most primitive existence any longer. On the contrary, it is better to destroy even that, and to destroy it ourselves. The





nation has proved itself weak, and the future belongs solely to the stronger Eastern nation. Besides, those who remain after the battle are of little value; for the good have fallen.”⁵⁸

So he ordered that the waters of the Spree be set loose in the Berlin underground to drown the thousands of German women and children who had found shelter there...

This was quite a logical end for nazism. The “führers” swore by the interests of the German population, and everything they did, all their atrocities they placed on the “altar” of these selfsame “interests of the German”.

Nothing came of global domination by the “new caste”. Therefore – shoot him, too, this German, kill the German people too – as they do winded horses. A good-for-nothing people. Take vengeance on them, too, because they, the “führers”, would croak, while the German people would go on living. Before the very end Goebbels howled:

“The German people deserves the fate that now awaits it... But entertain no illusions: I never forced anybody to be my associate, as we did not force the German people... Now you’ll have your throats cut... But if we are destined to depart, then let the whole world shudder.”⁵⁹

So this is what Khatyn is, the Byelorussian Khatyns! As Lidice and Oradour they are symbols of nazi atrocities and something more, too. This is where the nazis really showed their fangs which were until then concealed from many European countries.

The Byelorussian Khatyns are something so ominous it is difficult for the inhabitants of our planet to fully comprehend and fully feel... The Byelorussian Khatyns are the reality which nazism was preparing for whole countries and continents, but which they succeeded in introducing on a wide scale only here.

The Soviet people have paid heavy sacrifices so as to ensure that the world, that other peoples do not go through what they went through, that they do not experience hundreds and thousands of Khatyns. The price they paid was their own Khatyns.

This should be understood and known to those who come here, to visit Khatyn. This is the silent message of the dark figure of the old man carrying the body – so petrified and yet so soft – of a dead boy, and that of the numerous names of the former villages listed in the terrible “cemetery of villages” – the only one of its kind on Earth.

Sources. Literature

¹ *Top Secret! For Command Eyes Only! The Strategy of Nazi Germany in the War Against the USSR. Documents and Materials*, Moscow, Nauka Publishers, 1967, p.104 (in Russian).

² *Ibid.*, p. 105.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 396.

⁵ Johannes Leeb, *Der Nürnberger Prozess. Bilanz der Tausend Jahre. Kiepenheuer und Witsch, Köln-Berlin*, pp. 418-19.

⁶ *Top Secret! For Command Eyes Only!* p. 115.

⁷ *The Nuremberg Trial*, Collection of Materials, Moscow, Yuridicheskaya Literatura Publishers, Vol.1, 1955, p. 518 (in Russian).

⁸ *Top Secret! For Command Eyes Only!* p. 515.

⁹ *Criminal Aims – Criminal Means. Documents on the Occupational Policies of Nazi Germany on the Territory of the USSR (1941-1944)*, Moscow, 1963, p. 45 (in Russian).

¹⁰ *Crimes of the Nazi Invaders in Byelorussia. 1941-1944*, Minsk, Byelarus Publishers, 1965, pp. 278-79 (in Russian).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 65.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹⁵ *Biuletyn Głównej komisji badania zbrodni hitlerowskich w Polsce*, No XIV, Warszawa, 1963, p. 141.

¹⁶ "Życie Literackie", Kraków, 4 March, 1973.

¹⁷ *Druzhba Narodov*, No 9, 1973, p. 218.

¹⁸ *Results of World War II*, Collection of Articles. K. G. Pfeffer. *Germans and Other Peoples*, Moscow, 1957, p. 507 (in Russian).

¹⁹ Roger Manvell, Heinrich Fraenkel, *Goebbels*, Warszawa, Czytelnik, 1972, p. 173.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

²¹ Wacław Kral, *The Crime Against Europe*, Moscow, Mysl Publishers, 1968, p. 13 (in Russian).

²² Раманоўскі В. Супраць фальсіфікацыі гісторыі савецкага партызанскага руху. Мінск, Дзяржвыд БССР,

1962, стр. 54-55.

²³ "Literaturnaya Rossiya" No 52, 22 December, 1972.

²⁴ *The Nuremberg Trial*, Vol. II, p. 905.

²⁵ Dashichev V. I., *Bankruptcy of the Strategy of German Fascism*, Historical Essays. Documents and Materials, Vol. 2, Moscow, Nauka Publishers, 1973, pp. 30-35 (in Russian).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

²⁸ Allan Bullock, *Hitler. Studium tyranii*, Warszawa, Czytelnik, Vol. III, 1970, p. 109.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

³⁰ *Results of World War II*, p. 507.

³¹ Раманоўскі В. Саўдзельнікі ў злачынствах. Мінск, «Беларусь», 1964, стр. 124.

³² *Crimes of the Nazi Invaders in Byelorussia. 1941-1944*, p. 50-51.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

³⁴ *Ibid.*,

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

³⁷ Erich Hesse. *Der Sowjetrussische Partisanenkrieg 1941 bis 1944 im Spiegel deutscher Kampfانweisungen und Befehle*. Musterschmidt Verlag, Göttingen, 1969, p. 30.

³⁸ *Crimes of the Nazi Invaders in Byelorussia. 1941-1944*, p. 52.

³⁹ Photocopy from the archives Głównej komisji badania zbrodni hitlerowskich w Polsce. (Translated from the German.)

⁴⁰ Party archives of the Institute of the History of the Party under the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Byelorussia, fund 4, issue 33a, sig. 222, p. 12.

⁴¹ *The Nuremberg Trial*, Vol II, p. 908.

⁴² Wacław Kral, *The Crime Against Europe*, p. 13.

⁴³ Photocopy from the archives Głównej komisji badania zbrodni hitlerowskich w Polsce.

⁴⁴ *Top Secret! For Command Eyes Only!* p. 116.

⁴⁵ Johannes Leeb, *Der Nürnberger Prozess. Bilanz der Tausend Jahre*, pp. 418-19.

⁴⁶ *Crimes of the Nazi Invaders in Byelorussia. 1941-1944*, p. 48-49.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁴⁸ *The Nuremberg Trial*, Vol. II, p. 833.

⁴⁹ Allan Bullock, *Hitler. Studium tyranii*, Vol. III, p. 13.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 177.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 185.

⁵² *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 184.

⁵³ Walter Schellenberg, *Le chef du contre-espionnage nazi parle*. René Julliard, Paris, 1957, p. 101.

⁵⁴ Photocopy from the archive Głównej komisji badania zbrodni hitlerowskich w Polsce.

⁵⁵ Albert Kan, *Conspiracy Against Peace*, Foreign Literature Publishers, Moscow, 1961, pp. 94-95 (in Russian).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

⁵⁸ Allan Bullock, *Hitler. Studium tyranii*, Vol. III, p. 256.

⁵⁹ *Top Secret! For Command Eyes Only!* p. 558.

Complete with photocopies from German documents received from the archive Głównej komisji badania zbrodni hitlerowskich w Polsce (Warsaw).

German quotations used as captions to the illustrations were taken from the following sources:

The Nuremberg Trial, Collection of Materials, Vol. II.

Dashichev V. I., *Bankruptcy of the Strategy of German Fascism*. Historical essays. Documents and Materials, Vol. 1-2, Moscow, Nauka Publishers, 1973.

War in the Enemy Rear. From the history of the Soviet partisan movement in the years of the Great Patriotic War, Moscow, Politizdat Publishers, 1974.

Раманоўскі В. Саўдзельнікі ў злачынствах.

Раманоўскі В. Супраць фальсіфікацыі гісторыі савецкага партызанскага руху.

Biuletyn Głównej komisji badania zbrodni hitlerowskich w Polsce (Warsaw).

The authors made use of photomaterials referring to the time of the Great Patriotic War taken from the Central State Byelorussian Archive of Films and Photographs, from the funds of the Byelorussian museum of the history of the Great Patriotic War, and also from the following publications:

Der Zweite Weltkrieg Eine Chronik in Bildern von Heinz Bergschneider. Deutscher Militärverlag.

Walka (Kronika walki Armii Ludowej). Wyd. Ministerstwo Obrony Narodowej, 1963.

Stalingrad. Eine Chronik in Bildern von Heinz Bergschneider. Verlag der Nation, Berlin.

REQUEST TO READERS

Progress Publishers would be glad to have your opinion of this book, its translation and design and any suggestions you may have for future publications.

Please send all your comments to 17, Zubovsky Boulevard, Moscow, USSR.

Printed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

